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THE ARTS
OF
WRITING, READING, AND SPEAKING.
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THE ARTS
OF
WRITING, READING, AND SPEAKING.
IN
LETTERS TO A LAW STUDENT.

By EDWARD W. COX,
RECORDER OF HELSTON, AUTHOR OF "THE ADVOCATE," &c.

SECOND EDITION.

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1867.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THESE Letters having found unexpected favour with the Public, as with the Profession, the writer has availed himself of the call for a Second Edition, to revise and add to them. Having been adopted by many schools and families as an educational work, this new edition is published at a greatly reduced price, in the hope that it may be taken into general use.

1, ESSEX COURT, TEMPLE,
August 20, 1867.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THIS work was commenced with the purpose only to impart to Law Students some hints on the Art of Speaking, which had been suggested to the writer by experience and observation. It was expanded into its present form when, having been commenced, the writer was impressed with the conviction that to speak well it is necessary to be able to write well and read well. Hence the addition of these subjects to the original design. The writer trusts that they will not be found uninteresting or uninstructional.

1, ESSEX COURT, TEMPLE,
August, 1863.

7

LETTER L

LETTER II.

LETTER III.

ART OF WRITING.

LETTER IV.

LETTER V.

LETTER VI.

LETTER VII.

LETTER VIII.

LETTER IX.

The Art of Writing 52

ART OF READING.

LETTER X.

The Art of Reading *page* 57

LETTER XI.

The Art of Reading—What to Avoid—Articulation 63

LETTER XII.

Pronunciation—Expression	69
---------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----

LETTER XIII.

The Art of the Actor and the Reader 74

LETTER XIV.

The Management of the Voice—Tone 80

LETTER XV.

Emphasis 87

LETTER XVI.

Pause—Punctuation—Management of the Breath—Inflection ... 93

LETTER XVII.

Attitude—Influence of the Mental over the Physical Powers ... 101

LETTER XVIII.

Illustrations 109

LETTER XIX.

Illustrations of Tone, Emphasis, and Pause 118

LETTER XX.

Illustrations (continued)	124
-------------------------------	-----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

LETTER XXI.

Illustrations (continued)	180
-------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

LETTER XXII.

How to Read Poetry 138

LETTER XXIII.

Reading of Narrative, Argument, and Sentiment 147

CONTENTS.

vii

LETTER XXIV.

Special Readings—The Bible *page* 154

LETTER XXV.

Dramatic Reading... **161**

LETTER XXVI.

The Reading of Wit and Humour 169

LETTER XXVII.

The Uses of Reading 173

LETTER XXVIII.

Public Readings 178

ART OF SPEAKING.

LETTER XXIX.

The Art of Speaking 189

LETTER XXX.

Foundations of the Art of Speaking 193

LETTER XXXI.

The Art of Speaking—What to Say—Composition 196

LETTER XXXII.

Cautions—How to Begin...	201
--------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

LETTER XXIII.

The First Lesson—Writing a Speech 207

LETTER XXXIV.

The Art of Speaking—First Lessons 212

LETTER XXXV.

Public Speaking 218

LETTER XXXVI.

Delivery	224
-----------------	-----	-----	-----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	------------

LETTER XXXVII.

Action *page* 232

LETTER XXXVIII.

The Construction of a Speech 238

LETTER XXIX.

The Oratory of the Pulpit 245

LETTER XL.

The Oratory of the Senate 254

LETTER XLI.

The Oratory of the Bar 264

LETTER XLII.

The Oratory of the Bar (continued) 272

LETTER XLIII.

The Oratory of the Bar (concluded) 279

LETTER XLIV.

The Oratory of the Platform 285

LETTER XLV.

The Oratory of the Platform (continued) 291

LETTER XLVI.

The Oratory of the Platform (continued)	298
-----------------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

LETTER XLVII.

The Oratory of the Platform (concluded) 306

LETTER XLVIII.

Social Oratory 319

POSTSCRIPT—Penny Readings 324

THE ARTS

OF

WRITING, READING, AND SPEAKING.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

You have asked me for hints to help you in your studies of the Art of Oratory. I readily comply with your request, and I will endeavour to throw together my thoughts upon it in a shape that may possibly be useful to others also. It is a subject in which I have taken much interest and on which I hope to be enabled to convey to you some suggestions not to be found in existing treatises.

But I must take the liberty to change its name. I do not like the title—*oratory*—it has a pretentious sound. We do not think or talk of a man as an Orator unless he excels in the art; we look upon an oration as something higher and grander than a speech. If a man were to call himself “an orator,” we should call him conceited; but he might call himself “a speaker” without reproach to his modesty. So, if I were to profess to give you hints for the study of oratory, I should be reasonably met by the

objection that I am not myself "an orator," and therefore have no right to appear as a teacher of *oratory*. But by the requirements of my Profession I am compelled to be "a speaker"—an indifferent one, I know—and therefore I may venture, without incurring the charge of presumption, to impart to others so much as I may chance to have learned about the art of *speaking*.

But Speaking is only one form in which the mind expresses its thoughts. There are two other accomplishments, so intimately allied with the Art of Speaking, that I could not treat fully and satisfactorily of the one, without treating more or less of the others. I propose, therefore, to enlarge the main subject, and, embracing the allied Arts of *Writing*, *Reading*, and *Speaking*, to treat of each separately, but with more particular reference to the connection of the Arts of Composition and of Reading with the Art of Speaking.

And this title, indeed, exactly expresses my design. I contemplate nothing more than to convey to you the lessons taught to me by personal experience, as well as by reading and reflection, relating to the arts which enable a man publicly to give utterance to his own thoughts and the thoughts of others, so that his audience may hearken to him with pleasure and understand him without difficulty.

Writing is a necessary part of education for all, and Reading *ought* to be so. Oratory is *the business* of the Bar and of the Church: it is only the accomplishment of other callings. Unless you are content to subside into the chamber counsel, or to sit for ever briefless in the courts, you must learn to think aloud, to clothe your thoughts in appropriate language, and so to utter them that your audience may listen to you willingly. To do

this is not wholly a gift of nature, though many of nature's gifts are needed for its accomplishment. It is *an art*, to be learned by careful study and laborious practice. I do not assert that it can be acquired by all who may desire its attainment; on the contrary, it is certain that many are by nature disqualified from even tolerable proficiency in it. But if you possess the qualifications, mental and physical, requisite for the work, it is certain that you may advance to much greater proficiency in the art by pursuing it *as an art*, instead of leaving it, as is the too frequent practice, to be developed by accident and cultivated by chance.

When I was entering, as you are now, upon the study of my Profession, conscious of the necessity for acquiring the art of speaking, I sought anxiously in the libraries for a teacher. I found many books professing to elucidate the mysteries of oratory, and each contained some hints that were useful, amid much that was useless. But none supplied the information I most wanted. One was great upon inflections of the voice; another was learned upon logic; a third discoursed eloquently on rhetoric; a fourth professed to teach the composition of a sentence. There was no harm in all this, it is true—it was not wholly worthless; but it did not supply what I required. I wanted to be told *what to do*, *how to do it*, and *how to learn to do it*. After pondering over the pages of my many masters, I did not feel myself better qualified to stand up and make a speech; on the contrary, I was perplexed by the multitude of counsellors, and the variety and often the contradictions of their advice, and I felt that, if it be necessary that I should, while speaking, keep before me one twentieth part of the propounded rules, I should have no time to

think what to say. I turned the key of my door and attempted to put those rules into practice where failure would not be ruin, and I found that neither language, nor voice, nor gesture, as prescribed in the books, was natural and easy—but pedantic, stiff, and ungainly. After patient trial, I threw aside the books and sought to acquire the art of speaking by a different process—by *writing*, to teach facility and correctness of language; and by *reading aloud*, to teach the art of expressing thoughts.

Success was, however, but partial. Little practical guidance in the arts of writing or of reading could be obtained from the books that professed to teach them. I had to grope my way to the object, halting and stumbling, moving on and trying back, but nevertheless making some progress. I learned at least as much from failures as from successes, for thus I was taught what *not* to do. Assistance was eagerly sought in every quarter whence help could come. I read books and listened to lectures, “sat under” eloquent preachers, watched famous actors, frequented public meetings, political and religious, and practised speechifying in a small way to worthy and independent electors who were too tipsy to be critical. From these I gathered a great deal of instruction, not to be found in scientific treatises, as to the manner in which a man must talk if he would persuade his fellow-men. Subsequent experience has much enlarged that knowledge. My Profession has provided almost daily opportunities for seeing and hearing orators of all degrees of power and skill, observing audiences of all classes and capacities, and noting the treatment of subjects of infinite variety to kindle the speaker and attract the hearer. When I was a listener, the question was ever present to my mind,

"How are we, the hearers, affected by this? Are you, the speaker, going to work in the right way to effect your purpose?" If the speech was a failure, I asked myself, wherefore it was so? if a success, what was the secret of that success?

My personal experiences have not been large, but they have been very valuable as means for making trial of hints suggested by the efforts of others, and not less so by the proof they have afforded that it is one thing to know what ought to be done and another thing to do it.

Diligent study of writers and speakers upon the art of speaking and the practice of it had taught me a great deal of what I *ought* to do; but I could achieve only partial success in the doing of it. Performance fell very far indeed short of knowledge. I made the unpleasing discovery—that faults which are personal are not removed by mental recognition of the right. I felt painfully, from the first, that I could not act up to my own intentions nor put into practice that which I was able distinctly to define in theory.

I state so much by way of introduction, that you may understand wherefore I presume to teach what I confess myself incompetent to practise; and why, being but an indifferent speaker, I venture to treat of *the art of speaking*. Plainly, then, it is in this wise. For many years I have devoted much time and thought to the subject. By observation, reading, experience and reflection, I have obtained some practical knowledge how the art of speaking may be studied and should be practised, which, collected, arranged, and set forth as clearly as I can, may, perhaps, save yourself and others much of the labour that was lost to me for the want of an assistant and guide. In a few letters I may possibly be enabled to

convey to you the fruit of years of unassisted toil; and although I cannot hold out to you the promise that any amount of instruction can, without long and large practice, accomplish you as an Orator, I am not without hope that you may so far profit by my hints as to escape many of the difficulties and some of the errors that have beset myself, and into which the unguided steps of a learner are sure to wander.

And the same observations apply to the allied arts of Writing and Reading, upon which also I propose to offer you some hints.

LETTER II.

THE OBJECTS, USES, AND ADVANTAGES OF THE ART OF SPEAKING.

I must again remind you that the art of speaking is *the business* of the barrister and the clergyman; it is only an accomplishment with other men, but an accomplishment of such incalculable worth that it might be expected to form a necessary part of every scheme of education. Strange to say, it is, on the contrary, almost wholly neglected, even by those with whom some skill in it is a part of their profession. It is not taught in our schools. Not one man in a hundred of those who study for the Church or the Bar thinks it incumbent upon him to learn how to write, read, and speak, although he will labour sedulously, with the help of the best masters, to obtain other needful knowledge. We see multitudes industriously setting themselves to learn the art of singing: it appears not to be known that the arts of writing, reading, and speaking demand equally patient study, and equally good instruction, and are vastly more useful when they are attained.

You will be astonished if you attempt to measure the extent of the neglect of these arts in England. Reading is the foundation of speaking. If you read badly, you will not speak well. Recal your acquaintances: how many of them can stand up and utter two consecutive sentences on the most commonplace subject without confusion and stammering? Nay, how many can take

a book and read a page of it with even an approach to propriety? Certainly not one in fifty. This discreditable gap in English education is universal; this defect in training for the right use of the parts of speech is as apparent in the highest as in the lowest. Still more strangely is it seen in those whose callings might have been supposed to make the study of reading and speaking a necessary part of their education—the Politician, the Clergyman, the Barrister. Of these, the very business is to talk, and to talk so as to persuade; to persuade, they must be heard; and to be heard, they must so talk as to please the ears, while informing the minds, of an audience. But how few of them are competent to this! How few can read, or speak, otherwise than badly—giving pain rather than pleasure to the listener! And why? Because they have not *learned* to read and speak, nor tried to learn; they have not recognised writing, reading and speaking as accomplishments to be *acquired*—as *arts* to be *studied*.

Take our Politicians: go into the House of Commons, where you would expect to find all the members, by virtue of their calling, more or less competent to construct a sentence intelligibly and utter it decently. There are the picked men, chosen by constituencies, as we should presume, because they could represent them creditably. Yet what miserable speakers are most of them; what nonsense they talk, and how badly they talk it. They want every grace, they exhibit every fault, of oratory. It is not merely that great orators are few—that mediocrity abounds—for thus it must be everywhere, so long as Providence is pleased to make greatness rare; but they have not attained even to mediocrity; mediocrity is itself an exception; positive badness is the rule.

Nor is it better in the Pulpit. How few of all our preachers can lay claim to the title of Orator ; how rare is a good reader ; how abundant are the positively bad readers ! What public men have such advantages as they, in the greatness of their subjects, in their privilege to appeal to the loftiest as well as to the profoundest emotions of humanity, in the command they have of their audience, who must hear, or seem to hear, to the end of the discourse ? Yet how rarely do we find these advantages turned to account—how few can preach a good sermon, truly eloquent in composition and eloquently uttered, and how still more infrequent are they who can read with propriety a chapter in the Bible, so as to convey its meaning in the most impressive form to the ear, and through the ear to the mind. It is plain that, as a body, the Clergy—and I include those of all denominations—do not make the arts of writing, speaking, and reading, a portion of *their* course of study.

The Bar is a little, but, I must confess, only a *very little*, better. As with the Clergyman, the business of the Barrister is to talk ; but how many Barristers can talk even tolerably ? Spend a day in any of our courts ; watch well the speakers ; take your pencil and set them down in your note-book under the divisions of good, tolerable, indifferent, bad ; you will be astonished to find how few fall into the first class, how many into the others. But you will thus make acquaintance with those only who have obtained business, some by reason of their talking powers, others in spite of inability to make a decent speech. These are only a fraction of the whole group of wigs before you. It may be assumed that nine-tenths of the men who do not open their lips are as incapable of opening them with effect as are their

more fortunate brethren. It might reasonably be expected that men should not betake themselves to a profession, whose business it is to talk, without first assuring themselves that they possess the necessary natural qualifications and afterwards dedicating some time to a regular study of the accomplishments upon which their fortunes depend. The fact that men go to the Bar in crowds, although wanting the capacities which nature gives, or, having the natural gifts, without devoting the slightest study to their cultivation—sufficiently proves that the professional mind in England is not yet thoroughly convinced that speaking is *an art*, to be cultivated, like all other arts, the foundation of which must be laid by nature, but whose entire superstructure is the work of learning and of labour. We should deem it almost an act of insanity if a man were to make music or painting his profession, without previous study of the art he purposes to practise. But the Barrister and the Clergyman habitually commit this folly, and make it their profession to write, to read, and to speak, without having first learned how to do the one or the other.

It is not so in America. The art of oratory is universally studied and practised there. It is considered to be as much a necessary part of the routine of education as writing or arithmetic, and infinitely more important than music, drawing, or dancing. The consequence is that America abounds in orators. I am not setting up American oratory as a model—far from it—nor do I say that so much talk is desirable; but there is a wide difference between their excessive fluency and our excessive taciturnity. They sin against good taste often; there is too much indulgence in the mere flowers of

speech; but that is better than our English incapacity to speak at all.

What, then, is the meaning of the general neglect in this country, as a part of education, of those studies which might have been supposed to be the foremost pursuit of all whose special business it is to read and speak—especially the Clergy, the Bar, and the Solicitors? If these Professions are so negligent, it is not surprising that the public, with whom these arts are only accomplishments, should be equally negligent.

I suspect that the cause of the neglect lies, not so much in ignorance of the value of the art when acquired, as in a strange prejudice, widely prevailing, that to read and to speak are *natural gifts*, not to be implanted, and scarcely to be cultivated, by art. In the Church, the bad readers, being the majority, have sought to deter from good reading by calling it theatrical. Among the Lawyers there is an equally fallacious notion that studied speaking must be stilted speaking. I shall have occasion to show you hereafter how unfounded are these objections; at present, it suffices merely to notice them, as influential sources of the negligence of which I complain.

Another cause of the neglect of the study of the arts of reading and speaking, *as arts*, will, at the first statement of it, somewhat surprise you, but a little experience and observation will soon satisfy you of its truth. A bad reader is scarcely conscious of his incapacity. So it is with a bad speaker, but with the difference that, whereas all can read in some fashion, so that the only distinction is between bad reading and good reading, many cannot speak at all. Consequently, while nobody thinks he reads badly, many know that

they cannot speak. But of this you may be assured, that, as no man who reads seems to be conscious that he reads badly, so no man who speaks is conscious that he speaks badly. The fact is, that we cannot hear and see ourselves. In reading, we know what the words of the author are intended to express, and we suppose that we express them accordingly; so in speaking, we know what we designed to say, and we think that we are saying it properly. It is very difficult to convince reader or speaker that to other ears he is a failure.

No man imagines that he can sing well, or play well upon an instrument, without learning to sing or play, for two or three trials prove to him his incapacity; he is unable to bring out the notes he wants and he breaks down altogether. But every man can read after a fashion, and utter a sentence or two, however rudely, and therefore his imperfection is not made so apparent to himself—it is a question only of degree; being able to read and speak, and not being conscious *how* he reads and speaks, he cannot easily be satisfied that he reads and speaks badly and that proficiency must be the work of some teaching, much study, and more practice.

My purpose, in dwelling upon this almost universal neglect of the arts of speaking and reading by those whose fortunes depend upon the right use of their tongues, is to prevent you, if I can, from falling into the same fashion, and trusting your success to chance, in the fallacious belief that you are following nature. If any doubt can linger in your mind whether nature is all-sufficient for the purpose of oratory, I need but point to the wonderful lack of it—to the bad reading in the Pulpit, and the bad speaking at the Bar, in Parliament, and at public meetings. It is possible that study may

not remove the reproach, but it is certain that the present system does not succeed in creating or cultivating oratory. It will, at least, be worth while to attempt improvement; the effort cannot wholly fail, for, if nothing more, it will certainly make better readers of those who now read so badly.

The object is worth the effort. Apart from professional advantages, the art of speaking is the surest path to the gratification of your very laudable ambition to take part in the political and social life of your generation. In all countries and in all ages the orator has risen to distinction. But his art is nowhere so potent as in free countries, where liberty of speech is the birthright of the citizen. Wherever self-government is recognised, there must be gatherings for the purpose of transacting public business; men must meet together in their parishes, their counties, or by whatever name the subdivisions of their country may be known. They could not discuss the business of the meeting without some speaking, and the most pleasant speaker will assuredly win the ears, and therefore carry with him the feelings and the votes, of those who cannot speak. The same result is seen in all assemblies, from the vestry, which is the Parliament of the parish, to the House of Commons, which is the Parliament of the nation. A man who cannot speak is there doomed to insignificance; a man who can speak but badly is still somebody; the man who speaks tolerably is a man of mark; the man who speaks well at once establishes himself as a chieftain, and he holds in his hand the power of the whole assembly. Seeing, then, what a valuable accomplishment is the Art of Speaking—how surely it will lead to power, possibly to greatness, certainly to fame and probably to profit—the marvel is

that it is not more cultivated in this country. In truth, it can scarcely be said to be cultivated at all. Why is this? Is it that Englishmen are unconscious of its value, or that they think it a gift bestowed by nature, which art cannot produce and can do little to perfect? I cannot tell; but there the fact is. In our homes, in our schools, no pains are taken to teach young persons to speak or even to read; and he who cannot read well will not speak well. Parents and guardians cheerfully expend large sums for the teaching of music or drawing—whether a natural taste for it does or does not exist—accomplishments which only the gifted are likely to turn to good account in after life, and for the exercise of which there is seldom a demand; while the arts of reading and of speaking—the former daily in request, and the latter leading to success in life through many paths—are entirely neglected, or, if recognised at all, imperfectly taught by a lesson of half-an-hour in a week, or got up for the occasion of a display on those dreary days when the schoolmasters advertise themselves under pretence of exhibiting the abilities of their pupils.

LETTER III.

 THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE ARTS OF SPEAKING AND WRITING.

THE proverb *Poeta nascitur, &c.* has been extended to the Orator. It is only partially true as applied to either. There is no such thing as a born Poet or a born Orator. No man can write a good poem or make a good speech by the mere force of untaught nature; he must go through more or less of training to accomplish either. We have heard a great deal of uneducated poets; but this does not mean that they were able to scribble poetry when first putting their pens to paper. They were not *uneducated* poets, but only *self-educated* poets. If they had been trained to no other knowledge or accomplishment, they had trained themselves industriously to this. On the other hand, it is no less true that the Poet and the Orator must be endowed by nature with certain faculties, wanting which neither could achieve greatness. But there is this notable distinction between them, that inferiority, or even mediocrity, in a Poet renders his accomplishment uninteresting to others and almost useless to himself, whereas very small powers of oratory are highly useful to the possessor. Of this you may be assured, that, whatever the degree of capacity for oratory with which you may have been endowed by nature, you will never attain to proficiency in it without *much* training.

Doubtless you have shared the sort of hazy notion

floating in the public mind, that if you can only pronounce the words properly you can read; that if you have words you can speak; and that words will come, when they are wanted for a speech, as readily as they come in a *tête-à-tête*. I suspect you have formed no conception of the number and variety of the qualifications essential to good writing, right reading, and effective speaking; how, for reading, the mind must be cultivated to understand, the feelings to give expression, the voice to utter correctly, the taste to impart tone to the entire exercise; and, for speaking, how the intellect must be trained to a rapid flow of ideas, the instantaneous composition of sentences, with the right words in the right places wherewith to clothe the thoughts, the voice attuned to harmony and the limbs trained to graceful action, so that the audience may listen with pleasure, while their convictions are carried, their feelings touched and their sympathies enlisted.

I hope you will thoroughly understand that it is not my purpose, in these letters, to play the part of a professor and teach you to write, read, and speak, but only to put you in the way *to teach yourself*. My design is to impress upon you the absolute necessity for a formal study of the kindred Arts of Writing, Reading, and Speaking, if you would attain to such a mastery of them as will be required in your Profession, and to point out to you the paths by which they are to be sought. And I must repeat, in my own justification for making the attempt, that there is a very great difference indeed between knowledge and action. A man may well know precisely *what* should be done, and *how* it should be done, and even be enabled to impart that knowledge to others, without being able *to do* it. That

is precisely my position. By devoting to the subject a great deal of time and thought, I have been enabled to learn something of what a writer, a reader, and a speaker should do and should not do, what qualifications are required for each, and how their arts may be best cultivated and attained, but without ability perfectly to perform them myself; therefore it is that these letters propose nothing more than to convey to you, in a short time, the information that it has taken me a very long time to collect.

A perfect speaker would be almost a perfect man, so that there never was, and never will be, a perfect Orator. The best does but approach the standard of ideal excellence. Such great gifts of mind and body must combine to constitute an Orator that, when I detail them, you will cease to wonder that great Orators are so few. I will first sketch the mental qualifications, for these, or some of them, are absolutely indispensable, and their presence will go far to compensate for the absence of many physical advantages.

The foremost care of a speaker is, *to have something to say*; his next is, *to say it*; and his third is, *to sit down when he has said it*. These may appear to you very commonplace requirements, and you will probably think that I needed not have taken the trouble to write long letters to you to tell you this. But in fact, like other golden rules, they are more easy to remember than to observe. Consult your own experience, and say how many of all the speeches you have ever heard, on any occasion whatever, gave utterance to thoughts, to ideas, to aught that painted a picture on your mind, influenced your judgment, or kindled your emotions. Were they not mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, sentences

"full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," or words that scarcely fell at all into sentences, insomuch that, when the speaker had concluded, you could not very distinctly say what he had been talking about? And if this sort of speaker so abounds, how much more frequent still are they who never know when they have done and how to sit down having said what they desired to say. How many men, who are otherwise really respectable speakers, fail in this *faculty for sitting down*, are continually coming to a close and then beginning again, and when you mentally exclaim, "He is certainly going to finish now," start off on a new topic, or repeat the thrice-told tale, and take a new lease of your ears, to the severe trial of your patience.

The first qualification for attainment of the arts of speaking and writing is, therefore, *having something to say*—by which I mean, that you must have in your mind definite *thoughts* to which you desire to give expression in words. Wanting these, it is useless to attempt to be a speaker or writer. Thoughts will not come just when you are pleased to call for them. It is necessary that you should cultivate a habit of thinking clearly and continuously—of thinking, too, *your own* thoughts—and you must do this, not by vague fancies, but by trains of ideas logically arranged, and by accustoming yourself to think a subject *through*, instead of merely thinking vaguely *about* it.

For what is a speech but *thinking aloud*? You pursue a train of thought, and, by putting it into words, you seek to conduct the minds of your audience through the same train of thought to the same conclusions, and thus to make them share your emotions or convictions. To this end the aptest thoughts are nothing unless they

can be expressed in words as apt. This is an *art*; this does not come by nature. Nature contributes something to it by certain special capacities with which she favours a few, and she sometimes sets a ban upon others by positive incapacity to think consecutively, to find words readily, or to give them utterance in a pleasing manner. But even the most favoured by nature require sedulous cultivation of their faculties. Thought can only come from much observation, much reading and much reflection. Composition—by which I mean the choice of the fittest words, and the arrangement of them in the most correct and graceful sentences—can be mastered only by long study and much practice. Every man who aspires to be a speaker must laboriously learn the *art of composition*, for that is the second stone of the edifice.

I can give you no instructions for obtaining thoughts; they must arise from the natural or acquired activity of your mind, gathering ideas from all accessible stores. You must keep your eyes and ears ever open to receive all kinds of knowledge from all sorts of sources. Your information cannot be too diversified. Observation will supply the most useful materials; reading, the most various; reflection, the most profound. But you must be something more than a mere recipient of impressions from without; these must be intimately revolved and recombined in your hours of reflection, and then they may be reproduced in other shapes as your own thoughts. Accustom yourself to think, and give yourself time to think. There are many portions of the day which can be devoted to reflection, without trying to make thought a business. If a man tells me that he habitually closes his book, or lays down his pen, turns his face to the fire with his feet upon the fender, and throws himself

back in his easy chair *to think*, he may say that he is thinking, and perhaps flatter himself with the belief that he is thinking; but we know that he is only *dreaming*. The time for real reflection is when you are taking that exercise in the open air, which I trust you never neglect, and which is as needful to the accomplishment of a speaker as any other training. At such seasons, prepare yourself by steady thought for that which is the next process in the acquisition of the art.

And that is, *writing*. You must habitually place your thoughts upon paper, first, that you may do so rapidly; and, secondly, that you may do so correctly. When you come to write your reflections, you will be surprised to find how loose and inaccurate the most vivid of them have been, what terrible flaws there are in your best arguments. You are thus enabled to correct them, and to compare the matured sentence with the rude conception of it. You are thus trained to weigh your words and assure yourself that they precisely embody the idea you desire to convey. You can trace uncouthness in the sentences, and dislocations of thought, of which you had not been conscious before. It is far better to learn your lesson thus upon paper, which you can throw into the fire unknown to any human being, than to be taught it, in the presence of the public, by an audience who are not always very lenient critics.

LETTER IV.

FIRST LESSONS IN THE ART OF WRITING.

DILIGENTLY practise *Composition*—that is to say, the correct and pleasing expression of your thoughts in words. I do not mean that you should begin by writing a speech—that comes at the end of your training; but learn first to frame a neat sentence in apt language. Indeed, when you have achieved this, you are almost at the end of your labour. Simple as it seems, here lies all the difficulty. Words; sentences. Who has not words? you say. Who does *not* talk in sentences? I answer by another question; who *does*? Try it. You are, I believe, unpractised as yet in composition, beyond the writing of a love-letter in bad English, or verses in worse Latin. Take your pen and set down upon paper the first half-dozen reflections that come into your mind—no matter what the subject. Now read what you have written. First, examine the words—do they embody precisely what you intended to say? Are they fit words, expressive words—in brief, the *right* words? You must confess that they are not. Some are altogether wrong; some are vague, some weak, some out of keeping with the subject, some slovenly, some too big, others too small; strong adjectives are used as props to feeble nouns; and do you not see how continually you use three words to clothe an idea which would have been far more effectively conveyed in one?

Then look at your sentences—how rude they are, how shapeless, how they dislocate the thoughts they are designed to embody, how they vex the tongue to speak, and grate upon the ear that listens. There is no music, no rhythm, no natural sequence of ideas, scarcely even grammatical accuracy. And mark how the sentences are thrown together without order, severing the chain of thought, this one having little connection with its predecessor, and none at all with its successor.

Are you now satisfied that composition is *an art*, to be learned by labour and self-training, and that it is not so easy as talking in a smoking-room, with a short pipe to fill up the vacuities in thoughts and words?

Being assured of this by experiment, you will probably feel rather more inclined to make the necessary exertions to acquire an art which must be the foundation of your studies in the art of speaking, and after this manner may you proceed with your task.

Be content, for a time, with writing down the thoughts of others, and this for a special purpose that will presently be apparent.

Take a writer of good English — Swift, Addison, Dryden, Macaulay, Cobbett, or even leading articles of the *Times* (usually models of pure, nervous English)—and read half a page twice or thrice; close the book and write, in your own words, what you have read; borrowing, nevertheless, from the author so much as you can remember. Compare what you have written with the original, sentence by sentence, and word by word, and observe how far you have fallen short of the skilful author. You will thus not only find out your faults, but you will take the measure of them, and discover where they lie, and how they may be mended. Repeat the

lesson with the same passages twice or thrice, if your memory is not filled with the words of the author, and observe, at each trial, the progress you have made, not merely by comparison with the original, but by comparison with the previous exercises. Do this day after day, changing your author for the purpose of varying the style, and continue to do so long after you have passed on to the second and more advanced stages of your training. Preserve all your exercises, and occasionally compare the latest with the earliest, and so measure your progress periodically.

In this first lesson I pray you to give especial attention to the *words*, which, to my mind, are of greater importance than the sentences. Take your nouns first, and compare them with the nouns used by your author. You will probably find your words to be very much bigger than his, more sounding, more far-fetched, more classical, or more poetical. All young writers and speakers fancy that they cannot sufficiently revel in fine words. Comparison with the great masters of English will rebuke this pomposity of inexperience, and chasten your aspirations after magniloquence. You will discover, to your surprise, that our best writers eschew big words and abhor fine words. Where there is a choice, they prefer the pure, plain, simple English noun—the name by which the thing is known to all their countrymen and which, therefore, is instantly understood by every audience. These great authors call a spade “a spade;” only small scribblers or penny-a-liners term it “an implement of husbandry.” If there is a choice of names, good writers prefer the homeliest, while you select the most uncommon, supposing that you have thus avoided vulgarity. The example of the masters of the English tongue

should teach you that commonness (if I may be allowed to coin a word to express that for which I can find no precise equivalent) and vulgarity are not the same in substance. Vulgarity is shown in assumption and affectation of language quite as much as in dress and manners, and it is never vulgar to be natural. Your object is to be understood. You will be required to address all sorts and conditions of men; to be successful, you must write and talk in a language that all classes of your countrymen can understand; and such is the natural vigour, picturesqueness and music of our tongue, that you could not possess yourself of a more powerful instrument for expression. It is well for you to be assured, that while, by this choice of homely English for the embodying of your thoughts, you secure the ears of the common people, you will at the same time please the most highly educated and refined. The *words* that have won the applause of a mob at an election are equally successful in securing a hearing in the House of Commons, provided that the thoughts expressed and the manner of their expression be adapted to the changed audience.

Then for the *sentences*. Look closely at their construction, comparing it with that of your author; I mean, note how you have put your words together. The best way to do this is to write two or three sentences from the book and interline your own sentences, word by word, as nearly as you can, and then you will discover what are your faults in the arrangement of your words. The placing of words is next in importance to the choice of them. The best writers preserve the natural order of thought. They sedulously shun obscurities and perplexities. They avoid long and involved sentences. Their rule is, that one sentence should express one

thought, and they will not venture on the introduction of two or three thoughts, if they can help it. Undoubtedly this is often extremely difficult; sometimes impossible. If you want to qualify an assertion, you must do so on the instant; but the rule should never be forgotten, that a long and involved sentence is to be avoided, wherever it is practicable to do so.

Another lesson you will doubtless learn from the comparison of your composition with that of your model author. You will see a wonderful number of *adjectives* in your own writing and very few in his. It is the besetting sin of young writers to indulge in adjectives, and precisely as a man gains experience do his adjectives diminish in number. It seems to be supposed by all unpractised scribblers—and it is a fixed creed with the penny-a-lining class—that the multiplication of epithets gives force. The nouns are never left to speak for themselves. It is curious to take up any newspaper and read the paragraphs of news, especially if they are clipped from a provincial journal, or supplied by a penny-a-liner; or to open the books of nine-tenths of our authors of the third and downward ranks. You will rarely see a noun standing alone, without one or more adjectives prefixed. Be assured that this is a mistake. An adjective should never be used unless it is essential to correct description. As a general rule, adjectives add little strength to the noun they are set to prop, and a multiplication of them is always enfeebling. The vast majority of nouns convey to the mind a much more accurate picture of the thing they signify than you can possibly paint by attaching epithets to them. A river is not improved by being described as “flowing;” the sun by being called “the glorious orb of day;” the

moon by being styled "gentle;" or a hero by being termed "gallant." Pray *you* avoid it.

When you have repeated this lesson many times and find that you can write with some approach to the purity of your author, you should attempt an original composition. In the beginning, it would be prudent, perhaps, to borrow the *ideas*, but to put them into your own language. The difficulty of this consists in the tendency of the mind to mistake memory for invention, and thus, unconsciously, to copy the language as well as the thoughts of the author. The best way to avoid this is to translate poetry into prose; to take, for instance, a page of narrative in verse and relate the same story in plain prose; or to peruse a page of didactic poetry, and set down the argument in a plain unpoetical fashion. This will make you familiar with the art of composition, only to be acquired by practice; and the advantage, at this early stage of your education in the arts of writing and speaking, of putting into proper language the thoughts of others rather than your own is, that you are better able to discover your faults. Your fatherly love for your own ideas is such that you are really incompetent to form a judgment of their worth, or of the correctness of the language in which they are embodied. The critics witness this hallucination every day. Books continually come to them, written by men who are *not* mad, who probably are sufficiently sensible in the ordinary business of life, who see clearly enough the faults of other books, who would have laughed aloud over the same pages, if placed in their hands by another writer, but who, nevertheless, are utterly unable to recognise the absurdities of their own handiwork. The reader is surprised that any man of common

intelligence could indite such a maze of nonsense, where the right word is never to be found in its right place, and this with such utter unconsciousness of incapacity on the part of the author. Still more is he amazed that, even if a sensible man could so write, a sane man could read that composition in print and not with shame throw it into the fire. But the explanation is, that the writer knew what he *intended* to say—his mind is full of *that*, and he reads from the MS. or the type, not so much what is there set down, as what was already floating in his own mind. To criticise yourself you must, to some extent, forget yourself. This is impracticable to many persons, and lest it may be so with you, I advise you to begin by putting the thoughts of others into your own language, before you attempt to give formal expression to your own thoughts.

LETTER V.

READING AND THINKING.

HAVING accustomed yourself to express, in plain words, and in clear, precise, and straightforward sentences, the ideas of others, you should proceed to express your own thoughts in the same fashion. You will now see more distinctly the advantage of having first studied composition by the process recommended in my last letter, for you are in a condition to discover the deficiencies in the flow of your own ideas. You will be surprised to find, when you come to put them into words, how many of your thoughts were shapeless, hazy and dreamy, slipping from your grasp when you try to seize them, resolving themselves, like the witches in Macbeth,

Into the air: and what seemed corporal melted
As breath into the wind.

Arguments that appeared conclusive in contemplation, when translated into language, are seen to be absurdly illogical; and brilliant flashes of poetry, that had streamed through your imagination in the delightful promise of "the all hail hereafter," positively refuse to be embodied in words and disappear the moment you attempt to make prisoners of them.

Thus, after you have learned *how* to write, you will need a long and laborious education before you will learn *what* to write. I cannot much assist you in this part of

the business. Two words convey the whole lesson—*Read* and *think*. What should you read? Everything. What think about? All subjects that present themselves. The writer and orator must be a man of very varied knowledge. Indeed, for all the purposes of practical life, you cannot know too much. No learning is quite useless. But a speaker, especially if an Advocate, cannot anticipate the subjects on which he may be required to talk. Law is the least part of his discourse. For once that he is called upon to argue a point of law, he is compelled to treat matters of fact twenty times. And the range of topics is encyclopædic; it embraces science and art, history and philosophy; above all, the knowledge of human nature that teaches how the mind he addresses is to be convinced and persuaded, and how a willing ear is to be won to his discourse. No limited range of reading will suffice for so large a requirement. The elements of the sciences must be mastered; the foundations of philosophy must be learned; the principles of art must be acquired; the broad facts of history must be stamped upon the memory; poetry and fiction must not be neglected. You must cultivate frequent and intimate intercourse with the genius of all ages and of all countries—not merely as standards by which to measure your own progress, or as fountains from which you may draw unlimited ideas for your own use, but because they are peculiarly *suggestive*. This is the characteristic of genius, that, conveying one thought to the reader's mind, it kindles in him many other thoughts. The value of this to the speaker and writer will be obvious to you. Never, therefore, permit a day to pass without reading more or less—if it be but a single page—from some one of our

great writers. Besides the service I have described in the multiplication of your ideas, it will render you the scarcely lesser service of preserving purity of style and language and preventing you from falling into the conventional affectations and slang of social dialogue. For the same reason, without reference to any higher motive, but simply to fill your mind with the purest English, read daily some portion of the Bible ; for which exercise there is another reason also, that its phraseology is more familiar to all kinds of audiences than any other, is more readily understood, and therefore is more efficient in securing their attention.

Your reading will thus consist of three kinds ; reading for *knowledge*, by which I mean the storing of your memory with facts ; reading for *thoughts*, by which I mean the ideas and reflections that set your own mind thinking ; and reading for *words*, by which I mean the best language in which the best authors have clothed their thoughts. And these three classes of reading should be pursued together daily, more or less as you can, for they are needful each to the others and neither can be neglected without injury to the rest.

So also you must make it a business to *think*. You will probably say that you are always thinking when you are not *doing* anything, and often when you are busiest. True, the mind is active, but wandering vaguely from topic to topic. You are not really *thinking out* anything ; indeed, you cannot be sure that your thoughts have a shape, until you try to express them in words. Nevertheless you must think before you can write or speak, and you should cultivate a *habit of thinking* at all appropriate seasons. But do not misunderstand this suggestion. I do not design advising

you to set yourself a-thinking, as you would take up a book to read at the intervals of business, or as part of a course of self-training, for such attempts would probably begin with wandering fancies and end in a comfortable nap. It is a fact worth noting, that few persons can think continuously while the body is at perfect rest. The time for thinking is that when you are kept awake by some slight and almost mechanical muscular exercise, and the mind is not busily attracted by external subjects of attention. Thus walking, angling, gardening, and other rural pursuits, are pre-eminently the seasons for thought, and you should cultivate a habit of thinking during those exercises, so needful for health of body and for fruitfulness of mind. *Then* it is that you should submit whatever subject you desire to treat about to careful review, turning it on all sides, and inside out, marshalling the facts connected with it, trying what may be said for or against every view of it, recalling what you may have read about it, and finally thinking what you could say upon it that had not been said before, or how you could put old views of it into new shapes. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this will be to imagine yourself writing upon it, or making a speech upon it, and to think what in such case you would say; I do not mean in what *words* you would express yourself, but what you would discourse about; what ideas you would put forth; to what thoughts you would give utterance. At the beginning of this exercise, you will find your reflections extremely vague and disconnected, you will range from theme to theme, and mere flights of fancy will be substituted for steady, continuous thought. But persevere day by day, and that which was in the beginning an effort will soon

grow into a habit, and you will pass few moments of your working life in which, when not occupied from without, your mind will not be *usefully* employed within itself.

Having attained this habit of thinking, let it be a rule with you, before you write or speak on any subject, to employ your thoughts upon it in the manner I have described. Go a-fishing. Take a walk. Weed your garden. While so occupied, *think*. It will be hard if your own intelligence cannot suggest to you how the subject should be treated, in what order of argument, with what illustrations, and with what new aspects of it, the original product of your own genius. At all events this is certain, that without preliminary reflection you cannot hope to deal with any subject to your own satisfaction, or to the profit or pleasure of others. If you neglect these precautions, you can never be more than a windbag, uttering words that, however grandly they may roll, convey no thoughts. There is hope for ignorance; there is none for emptiness.

To sum up the exhortations of this letter. To become a writer, or an orator, you must fill your mind with knowledge by reading and observation, and educate it to the creation of thoughts by cultivating a habit of reflection. There is no limit to the knowledge that will be desirable and useful; it should include something of natural science, much of history, and still more of human nature. The *quicquid agunt homines* must be your study, for it is with these that the speaker has to deal. Remember, that no amount of antiquarian, or historical, or scientific, or literary lore will make an orator, without intimate acquaintance with the ways of the world about him, with the tastes, sentiments,

passions, emotions, and modes of thought of the men and women of the age in which he lives, and whose minds it is his business to sway. An orator must be most of all a man of the world ; but he must be accomplished also with the various acquirements which I have here endeavoured briefly to sketch.

LETTER VI.

STYLE.

You must think, that you may have thoughts to convey ; and read, that you may possess words wherewith to express your thoughts correctly and gracefully. But something more than this is required to qualify you to write or speak. You must have a *style*. I will endeavour to explain what I mean by that.

Style is not *art*, like language—it is a gift of nature, like the form and the features. It does not lie in words, or phrases, or figures of speech ; it cannot be taught by any rules ; it is not to be learned by examples. As every man has a manner of his own, differing from the manner of every other man, so has every mind its own fashion of communicating with other minds. The dress in which our thoughts clothe themselves is unconsciously moulded to the individualities of the mind whence they come.

This manner of expressing thought is *style*, and therefore may style be described as the features of the mind displayed in its communications with other minds ; as manner is the corporeal feature exhibited in personal communication.

But, though style is the gift of nature, it is nevertheless to be cultivated ; only in a sense different from that commonly understood by the word cultivation.

Many elaborate treatises have been written on style, and the subject usually occupies a prominent place in all

books on composition and oratory. It is usual with teachers to urge emphatically the importance of cultivating style, and to prescribe ingenious recipes for its production. All these proceed upon the assumption that style is something artificial, capable of being taught, and which may and should be learned by the student, like spelling or grammar. But if the definition of style which I have submitted to you is right, these elaborate trainings are a needless labour—probably a positive mischief. I do not design to say that *a* style might not be taught to you; but it will be the style of some other man, not your own; and not being your own, it will no more fit your mind than a second-hand suit of clothes, bought without measurement at a pawnshop, would fit your body, and your appearance in it will be as ungainly. But you must not gather from this that you are not to concern yourself about style, that it may be left to take care of itself, and that you will require only to write or speak as untrained nature prompts. I say that you must cultivate style; but I say also that the style to be cultivated should be your own, and not the style of another. The majority of those who have written upon the subject recommend you to study the styles of the great writers of the English language, with a view to acquiring their accomplishment. So I say—study them, by all means; but not for the purpose of imitation, not with a view to acquire *their* manner, but to learn their language, to see how they have embodied their thoughts in words, to discover the manifold graces with which they have invested the expression of their thoughts, so as to surround the act of communicating information, or kindling emotion, with the various attractions and charms of art.

I say to you, *cultivate style* ; but instead of labouring to acquire the style of your model, it should be your most constant endeavour to avoid it. The greatest danger to which you are exposed is that of falling into an imitation of the manner of some favourite author, whom you have studied for the sake of learning a style which, if you did learn it, would be unbecoming to you, because it is not your own. That which in him was *manner* becomes in you *mannerism* ; you but dress yourself in his clothes, and imagine that you are like him, while you are no more like than is the valet to his master whose cast-off coat he is wearing. There are some authors whose manner is so infectious that it is extremely difficult *not* to catch it. Johnson is one of these ; it requires an effort not to fall into his formula of speech. But your protection against this danger must be an ever-present conviction that your own style will be the best for you, be it ever so bad or good. You must strive to *be yourself*, to think for yourself, to speak in your own manner ; then, what you say and your *style* of saying it will be in perfect accord, and the pleasure of those who read or listen will not be disturbed by a sense of impropriety and unfitness.

Nevertheless, I repeat, you should cultivate your own style, not by changing it into some other person's style, but by striving to preserve its individuality, while decorating it with all the graces of art. Nature gives the style, for your style is yourself ; but the decorations are slowly and laboriously acquired by diligent study, and above all, by long and patient practice. There are but two methods of attaining to this accomplishment—contemplation of the best productions of art, and continuous toil in the exercise of it. I assume that, by

the process I have already described, you have acquired a tolerably quick flow of ideas, a ready command of words, and ability to construct grammatical sentences; all that now remains to you is to learn so to use this knowledge that the result may be presented in the most attractive shape to those whom you address. I am unable to give you many practical hints towards this, because it is not a thing to be acquired by formal rules, in a few lessons and by a set course of study; it is the product of very wide and long-continued gleanings from a countless variety of sources; but, above all, it is taught by experience. If you compare your compositions at intervals of six months, you will see the progress you have made. You began with a multitude of words, with big nouns and bigger adjectives, a perfect firework of epithets, a tendency to call everything by something else than its proper name, and the longer the periphrasis the more you admired your own ingenuity and thought that it must be equally admired by your readers. If you had a good idea, you were pretty sure to dilute it by expansion, supposing the while that you were improving by amplifying it. You indulged in small flights of poetry (in prose), not always in appropriate places, and you were tolerably sure to go off into rhapsody, and to mistake fine words for eloquence. This is the juvenile style; it is not peculiar to yourself—it is the common fault of *all* young writers. But the cure for it may be hastened by judicious self-treatment. In addition to the study of good authors, to cultivate your taste, you may mend your style by a process of pruning, after the following fashion. Having finished your composition, or a section of it, lay it aside, and do not look at it again for a week, during which interval other labours

will have engaged your thoughts. You will then be in a condition to revise it with an approach to critical impartiality, and so you will begin to learn the wholesome *art of blotting*. Go through it slowly, pen in hand, weighing every word, and asking yourself, "What did I *intend* to say? How can I say it in the briefest and plainest English?" Compare with the plain answer you return to this question the form in which you had tried to express the same meaning in the writing before you, and at each word further ask yourself, "Does this word precisely convey my thought? Is it the aptest word? Is it a necessary word? Would my meaning be fully expressed without it?" If it is not the best, change it for a better. If it is superfluous, ruthlessly strike it out. The work will be painful at first; you will sacrifice with a sigh so many flourishes of fancy, so many figures of speech, of whose birth you were proud. Nay, at the beginning, and for a long time afterwards, your courage will fail you, and many a cherished phrase will be spared by your relenting pen. But be persistent, and you will triumph at last. Be not content with one act of expurgation. Read the manuscript again, and, seeing how much it is improved, you will be inclined to blot a little more. Lay it aside for a month, and then read again, and blot again as before. Nay, for the third time let it rest in your desk for six months, and then repeat the process. You will be amazed to find how differently you look upon it now. The heat of composition having passed away, you are surprised that you could have so written, mistaking that magniloquence for eloquence, that rhapsody for poetry, those many words for much thought, those heaped-up epithets for powerful description.

LETTER VII.

LANGUAGE.

SIMPLICITY is the crowning achievement of judgment and good taste in their maturity. It is of very slow growth in the greatest minds; by the multitude it is never acquired. The gradual progress towards it can be curiously traced in the works of the great masters of English composition, wheresoever the injudicious zeal of admirers has given to the world the juvenile writings which their own better taste had suffered to pass into oblivion. Lord Macaulay was an instance of this. Compare his latest with his earliest compositions, as collected in the posthumous volume of his "Remains," and the growth of improvement will be manifest. Yet, upon the first proposition of it, nothing appears to be more obvious to remember, and easy to act upon, than the rule, "Say what you want to say in the fewest words that will express your meaning clearly; and let those words be the plainest, the most common (not vulgar), and the most intelligible to the greatest number of persons." It is certain that a beginner will adopt the very reverse of this. He will say what he has to say in the greatest number of words he can devise, and those words will be the most artificial and uncommon his memory can recal. As he advances, he will learn to drop these long phrases and big words; he will gradually contract his language to the limit of

his thoughts, and he will discover, after long experience, that he was never so feeble as when he flattered himself that he was most forcible.

I have dwelt upon this subject with repetitions that may be deemed almost wearisome, because affectations and conceits are the besetting sin of modern composition, and the vice is growing and spreading. The literature of our periodicals teems with it; the magazines are infected by it almost as much as the newspapers, which have been always famous for it. Instead of an endeavour to write plainly, the express purpose of the writers in the periodicals is to write as obscurely as possible; they make it a rule never to call anything by its proper name, never to say anything directly in plain English, never to express their true meaning. They delight to say something quite different in appearance from that which they purpose to say, requiring the reader to translate it, if he can, and, if he cannot, leaving him in a state of bewilderment, or wholly uninformed.

Worse models you could not find than those presented to you by the newspapers and periodicals; yet are you so beset by them that it is extremely difficult not to catch the infection. Reading day by day compositions teeming with bad taste, and especially where the cockney style floods you with its conceits and affectations, you unconsciously fall into the same vile habit, and incessant vigilance is required to restore you to sound, vigorous, manly, and wholesome English. I cannot recommend to you a better plan for counteracting the inevitable mischief than the daily reading of portions of some of our best writers of English. A page or two of Dryden, Swift, or Cobbett, will operate as an antidote against the poison you cannot help absorbing in your necessary

intercourse with the passing literature of the day. You will soon learn to appreciate the power and beauty of those simple sentences, compared with the forcible feebleness of some, and the spasmodic efforts and mountebank contortions of others, that meet your eye when you turn over the pages of magazine or newspaper. I do not say that you will at once become reconciled to plain English, after being accustomed to the tinsel and tin trumpets of too many modern writers; but you will gradually come to like it more and more; you will return to it with greater zest year by year; and having thoroughly learned to love it, you will strive to follow the example of the authors who have written it.

And this practice of daily commune more or less with one of the great masters of the English tongue should never be abandoned. So long as you have occasion to write or speak, let it be held by you almost as a duty. And here I would suggest that you should read them *aloud*; for there is no doubt that the words, entering at once by the eye and the ear, are more sharply impressed upon the mind than when perused silently. Moreover, when reading aloud you read more slowly; the full meaning of each word must be understood, that you may give the right expression to it, and the ear catches the general structure of the sentences more perfectly. Nor will this occupy much time. There is no need to devote to it more than a few minutes every day. Two or three pages thus read daily will suffice to preserve the purity of your taste.

The books that have been written on the subject of composition usually set forth a number of rules professing to teach the student specifically how he is to write a

sentence. I confess I have no faith in the virtue of such teachings. Many have tried them and found them worse than worthless—much more a hindrance than a help. It is impossible to think at once of what to say and the rules that are set to you how to say it. In fact, when we examine closely these propositions, we discover that they are not rules that have been used as guides by their authors, or by any other persons, but only principles which philosophers assert as governing the operations of the mind in the process of composition. In practice we do not so write because, according to certain set rules, we ought to write thus, but because the mind is so constructed as to express itself to another mind in certain forms of speech. These forms have been examined by philosophers, and their analysis of the mental operation has been turned into a series of rules, which are called “grammar.”

Your first care in composition will be, of course, to express yourself grammatically. This is partly habit, partly teaching. If those with whom a child is brought up talk grammatically, he will do likewise, from mere imitation; but he will learn quite as readily anything ungrammatical to which his ears may be accustomed; and as the most fortunate of us mingle in childhood with servants and other persons not always observant of number, gender, mood, and tense, and as even they who have enjoyed the best education lapse, in familiar talk, into occasional defiance of grammar, which could not be avoided without pedantry, you will find the study of grammar necessary to you under any circumstances. Your ear will teach you a great deal, and you may usually trust to it as a guide; but sometimes occasions arise when you are puzzled to determine which is the

correct form of expression, and in such cases there is safety only in reference to the rule.

I would gladly assume that you learned at school all that you have need to know of grammar; but experience forbids. I remember how little attention was paid to the teaching of English grammar in the public and classical schools of my own boyhood; and although some improvement has been made since, I fear that it would not be safe to enter upon the study of composition without at least refreshing your memory with the rules of grammar. If you ask me what grammar you ought to study, I must admit my inability to give you a satisfactory answer. I have never seen an English grammar that quite came up to the conception of what such a book should be. All the popular ones are too dogmatical and not enough explanatory. They appear to have been written by men who had forgotten the process by which they had acquired their own knowledge, and who taught from their own advanced position, instead of taking the student's point of view and *starting with him*. Rules ought to be accompanied with the reasons for them, and those reasons should not be stated in the language of the learned, but in the words used by the unlearned world; and the ideas they convey should not be those which assume that the listener knows a great deal, but such as would be addressed to a mind presumed to know very little indeed of the subject. The best with which I am acquainted (and it approaches very nearly to the ideal of such a work) is that by William Cobbett. I do not know even if it can now be procured; but if you can find a copy at any book-stall, buy and read it. Not only does it present its information in a singularly intelligible form, but it will amuse and fix your attention by

the quaintness of some of its illustrations. For instance, the author, who was an avowed Republican—for he did not live to see democracy setting up despotism in France, and republicanism rushing into civil war in America—takes his illustrations of grammatical errors from the Royal Speeches to Parliament. But, if you should not like his manner of teaching, you will assuredly profit by the perusal of his simple but vigorous English, and it will be in itself a valuable lesson to accustom your ears to our homely but expressive Saxon, unpolluted by the affectations with which it is too much the fashion of our day to deform the glorious instrument of thought that our fathers have transmitted to us.

LETTER VIII.

WORDS—SENTENCES—RHYTHM.

WHEN I recommend the study of grammar, I do not design that you should adhere pedantically to its rules. It is, indeed, necessary that you should know those rules, and the reasons for them, and how a sentence is to be grammatically constructed. But some latitude of discretion may be permitted in the application of those rules. Your good taste will, after a little experience, show you where they may be relaxed, and even, upon occasions, departed from. Certain it is that, if you were to compose an essay in strict compliance with the rules propounded by the grammarians, it would be painfully stiff and ungainly. On the other hand, in fear of a pedantic style you must be careful not to fall into the opposite extreme of slovenliness and incorrectness. It is not necessary that you should always write precisely according to rule, but never must you write what is positively ungrammatical. Between these extremes there lies a wide debateable land, recognised by custom, in which you may venture to turn out of the regular path in a manner which a pedagogue will tell you, and prove by reference to the rules, to be wrong, but for which you may assert the privilege of practice. I cannot supply you with any tests whereby you may be guided in your acceptance of these conventionalisms. It is entirely a matter of taste, and the cultivation of the taste is the only means by

which you can hope to write at once correctly and freely, not sinning against grammar, but also not a slave to it.

So it is with the structure of your sentences. You will find in the books many elaborate rules for composition. I do not say of them that they are wrong. I have no doubt that they are strictly true, as abstract propositions ; but I venture to assert that they are practically worthless. No man ever yet learned from them how to write a single sentence. No man keeps them in his mind while he is writing. No man deliberately observes them so far as to say, "I express myself thus, because rule the fourth tells me that I am to do so and so." After you have written, it is not uninteresting nor un instructive to compare your composition with the rules, and see how far you have adhered to them or how widely diverged from them, tracing the reasons for the structure of the sentences you have actually adopted. This is a useful exercise for the mind ; it confirms your confidence in what you do well, and perhaps reveals to you some errors and shows you how they are to be amended. But this is all. Your sentences will certainly shape themselves after the structure of your own mind. If your thoughts are vivid and definite, so will be your language ; if dreamy and hazy, so will your composition be obscure. Your speech, whether oral or written, can be but the expression of yourself, and what you are that speech will be.

Remember, then, that you cannot materially change the substantial character of your writing ; but you may much improve the form of it by the observance of two or three general rules.

In the first place, *be sure you have something to say.* This may appear to you a very unnecessary precaution,

for who, you will ask, having nothing to say, desires to write or to speak? I do not doubt that you have often felt as if your brain was teeming with thoughts too big for words; but when you came to seize them, for the purpose of putting them into words, you have found them evading your grasp and melting into the air. They were not *thoughts* at all, but *fancies*—shadows which you had mistaken for substances, and whose vagueness you would never have detected, had you not sought to embody them in language. Hence it is that you will need to be assured that you have thoughts to express, before you try to express them.

And how to do this? By asking yourself, when you take up the pen, what it is you intend to say, and answering yourself as you best can, without caring for the form of expression. If it is only a vague and mystical idea, conceived in cloudland, you will try in vain to put it into any form of words, however rude. If, however, it is a definite thought, proceed at once to set it down in words and fix it upon paper.

The expression of a precise and definite thought is not difficult. Words will follow the thought; indeed, they usually accompany it, because it is almost impossible to think unless the thought is clothed in words. So closely are ideas and language linked by habit, that very few minds are capable of contemplating them apart, inasmuch that it may be safely asserted of all intellects, save the highest, that if they are unable to express their ideas, it is because the ideas are incapable of expression—because they are vague and hazy. For the present purpose it will suffice that you put upon paper the substance of what you desire to say, in terms as rude as you please, the object being simply to measure your

ARTS OF WRITING, READING, AND SPEAKING.

If you cannot express them, do not attribute
to the weakness of language, but to the
dreaminess of your ideas, and therefore banish them
without mercy and direct your mind to some more
definite object for its contemplations. If you succeed
in putting your ideas into words, be they ever so rude,
you will have learned the first, the most difficult, and
the most important, lesson in the art of writing. The
second is far easier. Having thoughts, and having
embodied those thoughts in unpolished phrase, your
next task will be to present them in the most attractive
form. To secure the attention of those to whom you
desire to communicate your thoughts, it is not enough
that you utter them in any words that come uppermost;
you must express them in the best words and in the
most graceful sentences, so that they may be read with
pleasure, or at least without offending the taste.

Your first care in the choice of words will be that they
shall express precisely your meaning. Words are used
so loosely in society that the same word will often be
found to convey half-a-dozen different ideas to as many
auditors. Even where there is not a conflict of meanings
in the same word, there is usually a choice of words
having meanings sufficiently alike to be used indis-
criminately, without subjecting the user to a charge of
positive error. But the cultivated taste is shown in the
selection of such as express the most delicate shades of
difference. Therefore, it is not enough to have abun-
dant words—you must learn the precise meaning of
each word, and in what it differs from other words
supposed to be synonymous; and then you must select
that which most exactly conveys the thought you are
seeking to embody. I will not pretend to give you

rules for this purpose—I am acquainted with none that are of much practical value. Some of the books profess to teach the pupil how to choose his words; but having tried these teachings, I found them worthless; and others who have done the like have experienced the same unsatisfactory result. There is but one way to fill your mind with words, and that is, to read the best authors and to acquire an accurate knowledge of the precise meaning of their words—by *parsing* as you read.

By the practice of *parsing*, I intend very nearly the process so called at schools, only limiting the exercise to the definitions of the principal words. As thus:—take, for instance, the sentence that immediately precedes this—ask yourself what is the meaning of “practice,” of “parsing,” of “process,” and such like. Write the answer to each, that you may be assured that your definition is distinct. Compare it with the definitions of the same word in the dictionaries, and observe the various senses in which it has been used. You will thus learn also the words that have the same, or nearly the same, meaning, a large vocabulary of which is necessary to composition, for frequent repetition of the same word, especially in the same sentence, is an inelegance, if not a positive error. Compare your definition with that of the lexicographer, and your use of the word with the uses of it by the authorities cited in the dictionary, and you will thus measure your own progress in the science of words. This useful exercise may be made extremely amusing as well as instructive, if friends, having a like desire for self-improvement, will join you in the practice of it; and I can assure you that an evening will be thus spent pleasantly as well as

profitably. You may make a merry game of it—a game of speculation. Given a word : each one of the company in turn writes his definition of it ; Webster's Dictionary is then referred to, and that which comes nearest the authentic definition wins the honour or the prize ; it may be a sweepstakes carried off by him whose definition hits the mark the most nearly. But, whether in company or alone, you should not omit the frequent practice of this exercise, for none will impart such a power of accurate expression and supply such an abundance of apt words wherein to embody the delicate hues and various shadings of thought.

So with *sentences*, or the combinations of words. Much skill is required for their construction. They must convey your meaning accurately, and as far as possible in the natural order of thought, and yet they must not be complex, involved, verbose, stiff, ungainly, or tautological. They must be brief, but not curt ; explicit, but not verbose. Here, again, good taste must be your guide, rather than rules which teachers propound, but which the pupil never follows. In truth, there is no rule for writing sentences. It is easy to say what may not be done, what are the besetting faults, and perhaps to offer some hints for their avoidance. But there are no rules by observing which you can write well ; for not only does every style require its own construction of a sentence, but almost every combination of thought will demand a different shape in the sentence by which it is conveyed. A standard sentence, like a standard style, is a pedantic absurdity, and, if you would avoid it, you must *not* try to write by rule, though you may refer to rules in order to find out your faults after you have written.

Lastly, inasmuch as your design is, not only to

influence but to please, it will be necessary for you to cultivate what may be termed the *graces* of composition. It is not enough that you instruct the minds of your readers, you must gratify their taste and win their attention, giving pleasure in the very process of imparting information. Hence you must make choice of words that convey no coarse meanings and excite no disagreeable associations. You are not to sacrifice expression to elegance; but so, likewise, you are not to be content with a word or a sentence, if it is offensive or unpleasing, merely because it best expresses your meaning. The precise boundary between refinement and rudeness cannot be defined; your own cultivated taste must tell you the point at which power or explicitness is to be preferred to delicacy. One more caution I would impress upon you, that you pause and give careful consideration to it before you permit a coarse expression, on account of its correctness, to pass your critical review when you revise your manuscript, and again when you read the proof, if ever you rush into print.

And much might be said also about the *music of speech*. Your words and sentences must be musical. They must not come harshly from the tongue, if uttered, or grate upon the ear, if heard. There is a rhythm in words which should be observed in all composition, written or oral. The perception of it is a natural gift, but it may be much cultivated and improved by reading the works of the great masters of English, especially of the best poets—the most excellent of all in this wonderful melody of words being ALFRED TENNYSON. Perusal of his works will show you what you should strive to attain in this respect, even though it may not enable you fully to accomplish the object of your endeavour.

LETTER IX.

THE ART OF WRITING.

THE faculty for writing varies in various persons. Some write easily, some laboriously; words flow from some pens without effort, others produce them slowly; composition seems to come naturally to a few, and a few never can learn it, toil after it as they may. But whatever the natural power, of this be certain, that *good* writing cannot be accomplished without much study and long practice. Facility is far from being a proof of excellence. Many of the finest works in our language were written slowly and painfully; the words changed again and again, and the structure of the sentences carefully cast and recast. There is a fatal facility that runs "in one weak, washy, everlasting flood" that is more hopeless than any slowness or slovenliness. If you find your pen galloping over the paper, take it as a warning of a fault to be shunned; stay your hand, pause, reflect, read what you have written, see what are the thoughts you have set down and resolutely try to condense them. There is no more wearisome process than to write the same thing over again: nevertheless it is a most efficient teaching. Your endeavour should be to say the same things, but to say them in a different form; to condense your thoughts, and express them in fewer words. Compare this second effort with the first and you will at once measure your improvement. You

cannot now do better than repeat the lesson twice ; rewrite, still bearing steadily in mind your object, which is, to say what you desire to utter in words the most apt and in the briefest form consistent with intelligibility and grace. Having done this, take your last copy and strike out pitilessly every superfluous word, substitute a vigorous or expressive word for a weak one, sacrifice the adjectives without remorse, and when this work is done, rewrite the whole, as amended.

And, if you would see what you have gained by this laborious but effective process, compare the completed essay with the first draft of it and you will recognise the superiority of careful composition over facile scribbling. You will be fortunate if you thus acquire a mastery of condensation and can succeed in putting reins upon that fatal facility of words, before it has grown into an unconquerable habit.

Simplicity is the charm of writing, as of speech ; therefore, cultivate it with care. It is not the natural manner of expression, or, at least, there grows with great rapidity in all of us a tendency to an ornamental style of talking and writing. As soon as the child emerges from the imperfect phraseology of his first letters to papa, he sets himself earnestly to the task of trying to disguise what he has to say in some other words than such as plainly express his meaning and nothing more. To him it seems an object of ambition—a feat to be proud of—to go by the most indirect paths, instead of the straight way, and it is a triumph to give the person he addresses the task of interpreting his language, to find the true meaning lying under the apparent meaning. Circumlocution is not the invention of refinement and civilisation, but the vice of the uncultivated ; it prevails the most

with the young in years and in minds that never attain maturity. It is a characteristic of the savage. You cannot too much school yourself to avoid this tendency, if it has not already seized you, as is most probable, or to banish it, if infected by it. If you have any doubt of your condition in this respect, your better course will be to consult some judicious friend, conscious of the evil and competent to criticism. Submit to him some of your compositions, asking him to tell you candidly what are their faults and especially what are the circumlocutions in them and how the same thought might have been better, because more simply and plainly, expressed. Having studied his corrections, rewrite the article, striving to avoid those faults. Submit this again to your friendly censor and, if many faults are found still to linger, apply yourself to the labour of repetition once more. Repeat this process with new writings, until you produce them in a shape that requires few blottings, and having thus learned what to shun, you may venture on self reliance.

But even when parted from your friendly critic, you should continue to be your own critic, revising every sentence, with resolute purpose to strike out all superfluous words and to substitute an expressive word for every fine word. You will hesitate to blot many a pet phrase, of whose invention you felt proud at the moment of its birth; but, if it is circumlocution, pass the pen through it ruthlessly, and by degrees you will train yourself to the crowning victory of art—SIMPLICITY.

If you cannot find such a friendly critic, and the fit are few, you may achieve the object by your own effort, though less speedily and perfectly. Take one of our writers of the purest English; read a page; write his

thoughts in your own words ; compare your composition with his, mark line by line the differences, correct your writing from his text, then repeat the task, bearing in memory the faults you had committed before and striving to avoid them ; this exercise often repeated will tutor you to write well ; but it is more laborious than learning from a teacher, and will demand a large measure of patience and perseverance.

When you are writing on any subject, address yourself to it directly. Come to the point as speedily as possible and do not walk round and about it, as if you were reluctant to grapple with it. There is so much to be read now-a-days that it is the duty of all who write to condense their thoughts and words. This cannot always be done in speaking, where slow minds must follow your faster lips ; but it is always practicable in writing, where the reader may move slowly, or repeat what he has not understood on the first passing of the eye over the words.

In constructing your sentences, marshal the words in the order of thought—that is the natural, and therefore the most intelligible, shape for language to assume. In conversation we do this instinctively, but in writing the rule is almost always set at defiance. The man who would tell you a story in a plain straightforward way could not write it without falling into utter confusion and placing almost every word precisely where it ought not to be. In learning to write, then, let this be your next care. Probably it will demand much toil at first in rewriting for the sake of redistributing your words ; acquired habit of long standing will unconsciously mould your sentences to the accustomed shape ; but persevere and you will certainly succeed at last, and your words

will express your thoughts precisely as you think them, and as you desire that they should be impressed upon the minds of those to whom they are addressed. So with the sentences. Let each be complete in itself, embodying one proposition. Shun that tangled skein in which some writers involve themselves, to the perplexity of their readers and their own manifest bewilderment. When you find a sentence falling into such a maze, halt and retrace your steps. Cancel what you have done and reflect what you design to say. Set clearly before your mind the ideas that you had begun to mingle; disentangle them, range them in orderly array and so express them in distinct sentences, where each will stand separate, but in its right relationship to all the rest. This exercise will improve, not only your skill in the art of writing, but also in the art of thinking, for those involved sentences are almost always the result of confused thoughts; the resolve to write clearly will compel you to think clearly, and you will be surprised to discover how often thoughts, which had appeared to you definite in contemplation, are found, when you come to set them upon paper, to be most incomplete and shadowy.

These hints will, perhaps, suffice to give you aid in the Art of Writing, so far as it is a necessary introduction to the Art of Speaking, and that is all that I purpose to attempt in these letters.

LETTER X.

THE ART OF READING.

TURN now to the *Art of Reading*, for that also is a necessary introduction to the Art of Speaking. To be a successful speaker you must have something to say; you must be able to clothe what you desire to say in the best language, and you must give utterance to that language in such fashion as to win and hold the ears of your audience. Books and reflection will supply thoughts; composition will enable you to put those thoughts into words; reading will teach you to express those words rightly. If you do these things well, you will be a great orator; but it is not essential to success in speaking that you should attain proficiency in each of these acquirements. Many public speakers of high reputation fail in one or more of the accomplishments required by a great orator; but this is a defect in them, to be avoided so far as you can—not a manner specially to be imitated. Because one distinguished man hesitates in his speech, another is ungainly in action, a third does not frame a complete sentence, and a fourth is at a loss for words, you are not to deem yourself exempt from endeavours to avoid the faults into which they have fallen. They are not the less faults, not the less to be shunned; if you desire success, you must consent to learn what to do and what to shun, and strive earnestly to put in practice what you have so learned.

It is true that many persons speak well who read

badly, and good reading is not necessarily allied with good speaking; but I confidently assert that the two arts are so nearly connected that the surest way to learn to speak is to learn to read. But it is not alone a pathway to speaking that I earnestly exhort you to the study of reading. It is an accomplishment to be sought for its own sake. It has incalculable uses and advantages, apart from its introduction to oratory. Tolerable readers are few, *good* readers are extremely rare. Not one educated man in ten can read a paragraph in a newspaper with so much propriety that to listen to him is a pleasure and not a pain. Nine persons out of ten are unable so to express the words as to convey their meaning; they pervert the sense of the sentence by emphasising in the wrong place, or deprive it of all sense by a monotonous gabble, giving no emphasis to any word they utter; they neglect the "stops," as they are called; they make harsh music with their voices; they hiss, or croak, or splutter, or mutter—everything but speak the words set down for them as they would have *talked* them to you out of book. Why should this be? Why should correct reading be rare, pleasant reading rarer still, and *good* reading found only in one man in ten thousand? The enthusiastic advocates for popular music assert that every man who can speak can sing, if he would only learn the art of singing. If this be true of singing, much more is it true of reading. It is quite certain that every man, woman, and child who can talk may read, if resolute to learn to read, and, not content to read anyhow, look upon reading as an accomplishment. I do not say that every person who labours to acquire the art will be enabled to read *well*; to this certain natural qualifications are requisite, which are not given to all in the same

proportions and to some are denied altogether, and others may be impeded by the presence of defects that may be relieved though not quite cured. But it is in the power of *every* person, not having some natural deformity, such as a stammer, to learn to read *correctly*, so that his hearers may understand what he reads, and pleasantly enough not to vex their ears or offend their tastes. If you can but attain to this, it is an acquirement that will be of great service in life; it will spare you many unpleasant sensations of conscious awkwardness when you are compelled to read aloud to others. Few private persons can altogether escape this demand upon them; but a professional man cannot hope to do so. His business will certainly make continual calls upon his lips. A barrister, above all men, next to a clergyman, needs to read well, because he is daily required to read. A solicitor may hope to escape by shunning the practice that requires his appearance in the courts; but in vain. In his office he must sometimes read to his clients. If they excuse him, the public will not. A solicitor, especially in a provincial town, is looked upon as public property. He is expected, by virtue of his profession as a lawyer, to be the mouthpiece of the public of his locality; he is pressed into the service in all public affairs, thrust into the chair at public meetings, or enlisted as honorary secretary for societies, and required to read "the annual report" at the annual meeting; or resolutions are forced into his hands to be moved or seconded, or at elections he must speechify to the "worthy and independent" electors; or he is made the mayor, and called upon to read addresses to great personages, or to submit no end of reports and correspondence to the town council on matters of local

importance. *Every* Lawyer ought undoubtedly to learn to read, which branch of the Profession soever he may choose to practise, and whether he does or does not aspire to be a speaker.

My purpose now is to submit to you some hints for acquiring the ART OF READING.

The requirements of a reader are twofold — first, to express *rightly* what he reads ; and, secondly, to do this *pleasantly*.

First—of reading *rightly*. By this I mean *correct* reading ; that is to say, expressing fully and truly the author's meaning ; saying for him what he designed to say, and so transmitting to the mind of the listener the ideas which the author desired to impart. To comprehend fully what you ought to do when you undertake to read a book aloud, you should suppose that the thoughts you are going to utter are your own, coming from your own mind, and ask yourself how, if they had been your thoughts, and you had spoken them instead of writing them, you would have expressed them.

This is the grand rule for reading. The foundation of good reading is the *perfect understanding of what you read*. Without this you will never be a reader, whatever other qualifications you may possess. Strive, then, above all, and first of all, after this, and the rest will probably follow. It is one of the many benefits of learning to read, that you must also learn what you read. Until you have tried it, you cannot conceive the mighty difference there is in the knowledge you acquire of an author when you read him aloud and when you only peruse him silently. In the former case you must grasp every thought, every word, in all its significance ; in the latter, you are apt to pass over much of information or

of beauty, through inattention or impatience for the story. Of our greatest writers—the men of genius—it may be asserted that you cannot know them fully or appreciate them rightly until you have read them aloud. If you doubt this, make trial with a play of Shakespeare, and however often you may have perused it silently, however perfectly you may imagine yourself to be acquainted with it, when you read it aloud you will find infinite subtilties of the poet's genius which you had never discovered before.

I can proffer to you no rules for learning to understand what you read. The faculty is a natural gift, varying in degree with the other intellectual powers. But every person of sound mind is capable of comprehending the meaning of a writer who expresses himself clearly in plain language. Learned works can be understood only by learned men; but there are none who cannot appreciate a pictorial narrative; few who cannot enjoy a sensible reflection, a truthful sentiment, a poetical thought, a graceful style. To become a reader, however, you must advance a little beyond this. You must be enabled instantly to perceive these features, for you will be required to give expression to them on the instant. As fast as your eye falls upon the words should the intelligence they are designed to convey flash through your mind. You cannot pause to reflect on the author's meaning: your hesitation would be seen and felt. Now this rapidity of perception is mainly a matter of habit. It can come only from so much practice that the words suggest the thought at the moment they are presented. In this the studies previously recommended for the acquirement of the Art of Writing will very much assist you.

At the beginning of your exercises, if you do not already possess that rapidity of perception of an author's meaning, you should practise yourself by reading silently and slowly two or three pages of some book by some writer of genius, pausing at the end of each sentence to ask yourself what the author designed to say. Be not content with some general answer, but assure yourself that you really comprehend him clearly, by putting the thought into other words. This is a troublesome process, but it is very successful, and the labour at the beginning is saved at the end, for you will learn your lesson in a shorter time. I would even recommend that you perform this exercise in writing, for then you cannot escape in vagueness of idea, as when you trust to thought only. But whether you do or do not submit to that laborious task, you must read often and in silence before you begin to read the same pages aloud.

Having, as you suppose, thus tolerably mastered the meaning of the written pages, you may proceed to read them aloud. This process is of itself a monitor, for, if you have not found the meaning, you will be conscious of awkwardness in your manner of reading. Failing in the first attempt, try again, and again, and again, until you are enabled to express the thoughts as fast as the words are presented to your eye.

By such exercises as these, you will be assisted in the attainment of the first and most important qualification for a reader, the clear comprehension of the writer's meaning, seized at the very moment that his words are presented to your mind through the eye.

LETTER XI.

THE ART OF READING—WHAT TO AVOID—
ARTICULATION.

IF you rightly understand what you read, you will express it rightly. But it is also necessary to understand it readily, so as to read readily as well as rightly. Herein is the difference between reading aloud and reading silently. When you read silently, you can pause to ponder upon the meaning intended to be conveyed by the writer, and you should search for it till you have found it, and for that purpose you may try back and reperuse the sentence or the page as often as may be necessary. When reading aloud, you have no such liberty for pause, reflection and repetition. You must proceed, right or wrong, understanding or misunderstanding. The meaning of what you are to read must be caught at the instant your eye falls upon the words, or there will be hesitation in your speech, very perceptible to your audience, and very disagreeable. Practice alone will enable you to attain this rapid apprehension of the thoughts conveyed in the words. It cannot be taught; there are no rules for it—practice is the only path to its acquirement.

Having learned to express rightly and readily the thoughts which the writer whose language you are reading designed to convey, you have laid broadly and strongly the foundations for success in the art of reading.

But it is the foundation only of the art; all the ornament is to come. It is not enough to read rightly—you must read pleasantly as well as correctly, so that your hearers may not only be enabled to understand, but induced to listen. A dull, monotonous reader will not win the ear, however faultless his rendering of the sense of what he reads. Your reading will not be profitable to others, unless it is also pleasant to them. I proceed to give you some hints how to make it so.

First, I must tell you what you ought *not* to do. Shun equally mannerism and monotony. Do not, at the moment you open the book to read aloud, change your tone and style of speaking, as is the evil habit of so many persons. The term “many,” indeed, scarcely expresses the universality of this fault. The exceptions are extremely rare. Nineteen persons out of twenty read in a tone and with a manner altogether different from those in which they would have uttered the same sentences out of book. It is a bad habit, probably acquired from bad teaching in childhood, which they do not shake off in after years, because they have not practised reading or sought to attain something of it *as an art*. It is curious to note how a sentence, *spoken* at one moment in the most natural, and therefore truthful and expressive, manner, is followed instantly by a sentence *read* from a book with tone and manner entirely different, either stilted and affected or inexpressive and stupid, but thoroughly unnatural and artificial; and then, if the book be closed, without the pause of a moment, the talk will be resumed in the same easy strain as before. This is the first defect to be removed. Before you can hope to read well, you must thoroughly emancipate yourself from this bad habit of

treating reading as an operation altogether different from talking.

But you will ask me how you may learn to do this. You must first distinctly recognise the fault, for, as with most faults, knowledge is half way towards cure. You must remember, also, that in this instance your business is more to *unlearn* than to learn. You have acquired a bad habit, and you must rid yourself of *that*; you have laboriously taught yourself to be affected and unnatural, and you have to lay affectation aside before you can read naturally. But that, you will say, is the great difficulty. You are right; it is far more easy to learn than to unlearn. A bad habit, of slow growth and long cherished, is not thrown off without the exercise of much firmness and persistency. It *can* be conquered, if you will that it *shall* be conquered. Time and practice are the remedies. A few days, a few months even, may not suffice to effect a perfect cure; but week by week there will be a perceptible improvement; and though the fault may be never wholly removed, you will soon find such a lessening of it, that you need not be ashamed to read anything aloud anywhere.

Clearly understanding your fault, betake yourself to room where, being alone, you will not be shy of failure, and give yourself your first lesson in the art of reading, and thenceforth let this besetting sin be ever before you when you are practising; for if you forget it for a moment, during your earlier studies, at least, you will certainly relapse into the old strain. Do not begin with poetry, or speeches, or any kind of rhythmical composition that has a tendency to provoke old habits. You would sing poetry and mouth an oration; everybody

does who has not studied reading as an art. But select some very simple narrative, especially if it contains a conversational dialogue, such as people talk in real life. Before you pronounce a word, ask yourself this question, "If I were going to tell this story out of my own head, instead of reading it from this book, to a friend sitting in that chair, myself sitting quite as composedly in this one, how should I utter it?" In such manner try now to read it aloud, addressing the said chair as if your friend was there in person. At first make no attempt to read *well*; practise nothing but how to read *naturally*. Repeat the same reading several times in succession, noting with a pencil such passages as you *feel* not to have been properly spoken, and when you come to them again take special pains to avoid the fault of which you were conscious before. Suppose that you choose for your first lesson Anderssen's clever story of the "Emperor's New Clothes" (and you could not find a better for your purpose). Think how you would tell it to your family circle, after dark, before a Christmas fire, and in that manner try to read it. The perfection of such a reading would be, so to read that the eyes only of your audience, and not their ears, could tell them that you *are* reading. This must be your aim, and to this skill you will gradually approach—insensibly, perhaps, if day be measured by day, but perceptibly enough to a listener at intervals of a month.

I dwell thus upon this first step in your self-teaching, because it lies at the foundation of good reading; and if the faults of early habit are not thrown off, and a natural manner restored, whatsoever your other accomplishments, you cannot become a good reader. The *Art of Reading* can be mastered only by practice,

conducted as I have described (for I am treating now of *self-instruction*), and that practice persistently pursued for a long time.

I would recommend to you that, at the beginning, you give your exclusive attention to this subject. It should engross your thoughts during your reading practice. Have no other care than how to read *naturally*. When you have made some manifest progress in this, and you are conscious that you are beginning to read as unaffectedly as you talk, you may begin to have regard to the other qualifications of a reader.

And of these the first is to *sound your words*. Here, too, you will probably have much to *unlearn*. It is almost certain that you have fallen into habits of slovenly utterance, acquired in early childhood, and never afterwards corrected; for at school it is seldom deemed necessary to teach the pupil to speak and read—it seems to be taken for granted that he can do thus much, or that it is a matter for his own correction only, and not within the province of a regular educational course. Moreover, in our daily talk we do not speak distinctly. We drop letters, we join words, we slur sounds, we mutter much that should be spoken. This is peculiarly an English fault, and you must guard against it sedulously, for it is a bar to good reading. The cure for it is the same as for the habit already noticed—*practice*—until you have so conquered it, that the full sound of the word comes to your lips as readily as the imperfect sound to which they had been trained before. You must begin by an exaggeration of expression slowly repeated; for it is supposed that you pursue this study alone, or with only a friendly adviser. Taking your book, pronounce each word deliberately, with a short

pause between each one, and giving positive expression to every sound in the word. Make no attempt during this practice to do more than pronounce. Do not try to *read*; your present purpose is to master *articulation*. Remember this, that there are very few words with letters in them actually mute. Such letters are not sounded separately, it is true, but for the most part they modify the sound of other letters. Give to each sound that goes to make up the word its *full value*; do not omit to roll the "r's" and hiss the "s's" while learning your lesson; there is no danger of your running into the extreme of expression. Having in this manner read a sentence very slowly, read it again somewhat less slowly, and so three or four times, increasing the speed of utterance, until you find that you read it with ease and readiness. An articulation so acquired is of infinite advantage, for it is thus that you make yourself distinctly heard afar off as well as near, and thus it is that you are enabled to express the most delicate shades of emotion by the most delicate inflections of sound.

LETTER XII.

PRONUNCIATION—EXPRESSION.

HAVING, by slow reading and giving full expression to every sound, tutored yourself in *articulation* and subdued the habitual tendency of the tongue to drop letters, slur syllables, and dovetail words, you may gradually resume the proper speed in reading; pausing, however, and repeating the lesson, whenever you find yourself returning to your old habits of speech. The time thus spent will be a gain to you in the end, for you cannot read well until this mechanical portion of the art is accomplished mechanically, without requiring the aid of the mind, which must be engaged upon other parts of your work. If you are considering how you shall pronounce your words, you cannot be thinking also what is the meaning of the author and how it should be conveyed to your audience—the only matters upon which the mind should be occupied while practising the art of reading. Therefore will it be necessary for you to exercise yourself in articulation for a very long time, and not to cease from practice, until you have so mastered it that you articulate well unconsciously, without thinking *how* you are to articulate.

When you can articulate your words well, turn your attention to the *pronunciation of sentences*. In learning to articulate, you have practised with single words, giving to each its full sound, without reference to its

association with other words. You will now study how to pronounce many words placed together. In this process you have not, as before, to sound each word in full, but you must mould the pronunciation of each according to the meaning it is designed to convey, and also in accordance with certain conventional laws of speech by which, in a collocation of sounds, some are subordinated to others, and some modified so as to harmonise with those which precede or follow. Here, again, teachers of elocution profess to prescribe rules for the guidance of the pupil, which may be correct in themselves, but the observance of which would certainly make the reader who *tries* to observe them an ungainly pedant and his reading a positive pain to his audience. Pronunciation is, in truth, a matter of taste and ear, and if you cannot learn it by help of these monitors within, you will never master it by rules prescribed from without.

I am treating now of *pronunciation* merely. The right *expression* to be given to sentences will be the subject for much more extended consideration presently.

Practice and patience are the only hints I can offer you for the acquirement of a correct and pleasing pronunciation. But it is almost certain that you will not be entirely free from defects acquired in early life, and especially from provincialisms, of which it is so very hard to rid yourself, because you are not conscious of their presence. The sounds of the first words written on your memory are hard to be obliterated and never can be corrected by your own unaided efforts. The simple remedy is to invite the assistance of a friend, who will be quite as efficient for the purpose as a master; ask him to listen while you read, and to detect any pro-

vincialisms, or faulty or slovenly pronunciations, of which you may be guilty. Direct him to stop you as the word is spoken and show you your error by uttering to you the word, first, as you spoke it, and then as it ought to have been spoken; and you should repeat it again and again until he ceases to find any fault with it. When you have thus completed a sentence and corrected every word that was imperfectly pronounced, read it again twice or thrice, rapidly but clearly, to be sure that you have caught the true sounds; then, after an interval of diversion of the ear by reading other things, return to the passages that were the most incorrectly read, and try them again, until you can read them rightly without reflection or pause. Scoring the imperfectly pronounced words with a pencil, as your listening friend, or your own ear, tells you of their faultiness, will assist you in the performance of this useful exercise.

Having thus acquired distinct *articulation* and correct *pronunciation*, you will address yourself to the third stage in the art of reading—*expression*. Not merely must single words be fully sounded, and collected words rightly sounded, but that which you read requires to be uttered in the proper *tone* and with correct *emphasis*.

I shall best explain to you what I mean by this, and convince you of its importance, by looking at the sources of it.

Speech is one, and the most frequent, of the media by which mind communicates with mind. When you address another person, it is your purpose either to convey to him some fact, or to excite in him some emotion, or to convince him by some argument. Strict philosophy would assign this third object to the former ones; but, as I am not writing a philosophical treatise, but merely

telling you my experiences as to the best manner of learning an art, I prefer this threefold description as most intelligible. Whatever the mind desires to convey it expresses, naturally and unconsciously, in a manner of its own. You will instantly recognise this natural language in the expression of the more powerful emotions—joy, grief, fear. Each has its proper *tone*, the meaning of which is recognised by all human beings, whether the emotion be or be not shaped into speech. But the finer emotions have their own appropriate expression also, which you may discover if you observe closely, diminishing by delicate shades until they can be caught only by the refined ear, and from which we may conclude that whatever the mind desires to express in speech is naturally and unconsciously uttered in a tone appropriate to itself, and which tone is adapted to excite the corresponding emotion in the mind to which it is addressed. You feel alarm—your voice, without effort on your part, sounds the note of alarm; it falls upon the ear and passes into the mind of another man, and instantly excites the same emotion in him. You are oppressed with grief—you give utterance to your grief in tones of sadness; the mind that hears them feels sad too; the same emotion is awakened in that mind by the faculty which is called *sympathy*. Words that come from the mind are but the mind made audible and therefore must vary with every wave of thought or feeling. This is what I mean by *expression* in reading.

We have not always expression when we speak, because sometimes we talk almost mechanically, without the mind being engaged; or rather with no purpose to convey any state of our own mind to the minds of others. That kind of talk you will readily recognise. There is

another sort of speech that may be without expression, which we call speaking *by rote*, where words come from the memory only and not from the mind. This exception, indeed, admirably illustrates the rule. It is a proverbial saying, that a man talks like a parrot—by rote—to imply that he is merely reproducing sounds that have been impressed upon his memory, and not giving utterance to thoughts and feelings existing in his mind. You know the unmistakable monotony of speech by rote, and may thus, perhaps, more clearly apprehend my meaning when in these letters I treat only of the speech that expresses by infinite tones the infinite conditions of the mind from which it proceeds.

You will readily gather from this brief sketch of the source of *Expression* that it is a mental process, and that the surest, if not the only, way to accomplish it is to speak from the mind. If, in reading, you were uttering your own thoughts, there would be no difficulty in this, for nature would supply the right tones without an effort, and even without consciousness, on your part. You will say, perhaps, that in reading you do *not* express your own mind, but the mind of another. That is true; but the same principle applies. *In order to read well you must make the thoughts of the author your own.* This is a special faculty, possessed by various minds in various degrees. I can best explain it to you by reference to the case of the actor, who is a reader from memory instead of from book, and in whom the faculty is so highly cultivated that its operation can be most clearly seen. But the subject will require a longer exposition than could properly be given to it at the close of a letter; so at this point I pause.

LETTER XIII.

THE ART OF THE ACTOR AND THE READER.

THE Actor reads from his memory instead of reading from a book, and he adds *action* to *expression*. The reader reads from the book, and not from his memory, but he should recite what he reads in precisely the same manner as does the actor. You have often heard it said of a man that he reads in a theatrical manner, as if that is a fault in him; but, before it is admitted to be a fault, we must understand precisely in what sense the phrase is used. The term might be employed to indicate reading like a bad actor or like a good one. Some persons, educated in evil habits of reading, unaccustomed to hear good reading, and who have never contemplated reading as an art and an accomplishment, might ignorantly denounce as "theatrical" any reading that rises above gabbling and all attempts to give natural expression to the words and thoughts. Such reading is "theatrical," indeed, but only in a commendable sense. There is, however, a theatrical *manner*, that is called so reproachfully, and with justice, for it means reading like a *bad* actor—ranting, mouthy, and declamatory, or lugubrious and droning; tearing a passion to tatters, swelling into sing-song, or lapsing into a monotonous drawl. Exaggerated expression in reading is like a part over-acted on the stage; but it is preferable to the absence of expression; and therefore see that you

do not fall into the fault of monotony through fear of being called "theatrical."

The faculty by which an actor is enabled to accomplish his task is that which gives to him the power of forgetting himself and becoming somebody else. Reflect for a moment what a man must do in order to play some part in a drama—Hamlet, for instance. He must become Hamlet for the time, and for that time he must cease to be himself; he must think and feel as Hamlet, or he cannot look and move like Hamlet. He does not this by a process of argument; he does not read a scene in the play, and then say to himself, "Here Hamlet is awe-stricken at the appearance of the Ghost, and to look as if I was awe-stricken I must stand in this posture, and open my eyes thus wide, and make my voice quiver—so,—and speak in such a tone." All this would be impossible of acquirement as a matter of teaching, for the memory could never carry such a multitude of directions and recall them at the right moment. The actual process is more simple. The *true* actor reads the play; he ascertains what was the character of Hamlet; he learns the language put into Hamlet's mouth. When he reproduces it, he becomes Hamlet, feels and thinks as Hamlet; the words have entered into his mind and excited there the precise emotions Hamlet was imagined to feel by the genius that created him. He feels them, not by rule, or by an effort of his own, but *instinctively*. The mind being moved, the voice, the aspect, the action, express the mind's emotions. It was thus that the dramatist wrote. He, too, did not artfully construct the thoughts and emotions conveyed by the words spoken by his personages. Placing his own mind in their positions, he felt the feelings and thought the

thoughts which such persons in such cases would have felt and thought, and these he clothed in appropriate language. The actor seizes upon the same personages, performs the same process of placing himself in imagination in the same positions, feels and thinks thus, and therefore rightly expresses the emotions and thoughts of the author. The difference between the genius of the actor and the genius of the author is this—that the actor does not create, he merely expresses the creations of the author. Although the creative genius is the greatest, great is the genius that can embody those creations, and make them live before our eyes. When the process is contemplated, we cannot but marvel much at the power that can so identify itself with the emotions of another mind as to become that mind for a season, feel all that it felt, think all that it thought, and then express those thoughts and feelings, as the creator of the character would have expressed them, had he possessed the power to do so.

To be a *good* reader, you must possess a *portion* of this faculty of the actor. The great actor has two mental powers that are perfectly distinct, each of which might exist without the other. He must be able to *read* truly and to *act* rightly. It is not enough for *him* that he can read the part as it ought to be read; he must also be able to act it as it ought to be acted. Herein is the difference between the actor and the reader. The reader requires to be only half an actor; he needs but to be accomplished in the first portion of the actor's art. Hence it is more easy to be a good reader than a good actor; hence it is that, although a good actor must be a good reader, you may be a very good reader without being also a good actor. But bear

this in mind, that you should endeavour to accomplish yourself even to the actor's skill in reading, and that the test of your excellence will be precisely that which would be applied to the *reading* of his part by the actor upon the stage. As the critic would sit in judgment on the manner in which an actor *reads* Hamlet when he acts it—that is to say, how he expresses the words, apart from the *acting*—so would a judicious critic judge your reading of it when seated in the drawing-room. The rules to be observed by both are the same; the same effects are to be studied, the same intonations to be used. You should so read that, if the listener's eyes were bandaged, he could not tell that you were not acting, save by perceiving that your voice is stationary.

I have dwelt on this connection, and distinction, between acting and reading, because they are seldom rightly understood even by those who have studied the art of reading. Some, fearing to be thought "theatrical," make a positive endeavour to avoid reading as an actor should read; and, on the other hand, some think that acting and reading are identical and rush into a mannerism that imperfectly unites the two and spoils both, and these are the readers to whom the reproach of being "theatrical" properly applies. By clearly understanding what is the precise boundary between reading and acting—how nearly they approach, but never touch—you will, I hope, educate yourself to advance boldly to the boundary of your art, without trespassing beyond it into the territory that belongs exclusively to the actor.

I cannot too often repeat to you that the foundations of the art of reading are *understanding* and *feeling*. If you do not clearly see the writer's meaning, you cannot interpret truly his thoughts; and unless you can feel

the emotions he is painting, you cannot give the right expression to the words that breathe them. If you are deficient in either of these faculties, no study will make you a good reader. Having these natural gifts, all the rest may be acquired by diligence and training. I do not assert that, without these qualifications, it is useless to learn the art of reading. I desire only to warn you that, wanting them, or either of them, you may not hope to become an *accomplished* reader. But you may acquire sufficient of the art for all the ordinary purposes of business or recreation; you may read easily to yourself and pleasantly to others—more pleasantly, indeed, than many who possess the natural qualifications you want, but want the training you have received. Do not, therefore, be disheartened should you discover that you cannot throw your mind instantly into the conceptions of the author, so as to think and feel them as if they had been your own; but manfully resolve to learn to do that which not one educated man in ten *can* do, namely, to read a page of prose or poetry with common propriety, to say nothing of reading it with effect.

And do not too hastily conclude that you have not the faculties in question. Rarely are they quite absent from any mind. Often they lie dormant for want of cultivation and stimulus, unknown even to the possessor, until some accident reveals to himself and others the capacities of which he was not before conscious. They may be awakened from sleep; they may be stimulated into action; they may be cultivated into excellence. Be assured that they are quite wanting in you before you despair. Do not resign on the first trial. Persevere until conviction is forced upon you.

How may you ascertain this important fact? Take

some dramatic composition, some play of Shakespeare which you have not seen upon the stage, or a chapter of dialogue in a novel, and read it aloud. Are you conscious that you understand the author's meaning? Do you *feel* the emotions he expresses, or do they go into your ear and out at your lips without passing through your mind and there becoming instinct with soul, so that you speak living words, and not mere inanimate sounds? Your own feelings will soon tell you if you have any sympathies with the author. But if you are unwilling to trust yourself, ask the same judicious friend, before recommended as your assistant, to lend you his ears for half-an-hour's reading. He can surely tell, if you cannot, whether you read with emotion or by rote. Improve yourself by hearing good reading and seeing good acting whensoever the opportunity offers; and, comparing your own reading with that of the reader or actor, you will the more readily discover your own deficiencies and set to mending them.

Thus we arrive at the conclusion that reading is *an art* which all may acquire sufficiently for the daily uses of life at home or abroad.

As an *accomplishment*, where the *pleasure* of the audience is the object, reading must be something more than tolerable—it must be *good*.

LETTER XIV.

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE VOICE—TONE.

I HAVE endeavoured to explain to you, that to become a good reader you must learn to *pronounce the words* properly and *express the sense* rightly. These are the indispensable foundations of reading; but divers accomplishments of various values must be superadded. Of these presently.

You now understand, I hope, what it is you have need to acquire. I will now proceed to give you some hints (for it will be impossible to do more by writing than suggest) how to pursue this acquirement; how you may best learn to read *correctly* and *expressively*.

As I have already observed, the first step is the most difficult—it is the banishment of positive faults. Few are free from them altogether; they are painfully prominent in the majority of persons, however highly educated. There is but one training that will cure these defects. You may modify, but you cannot remove, them by your own unaided efforts, because, so much has habit familiarised them, you are not conscious of their presence. A judicious friend would indicate them to you—so would a master; but a friend is preferable, for masters are almost always infected with mannerism, and there is the utmost danger of their infecting you. A friend who would serve you by listening and indicating your faults on the instant, compelling you to repetition

of the word or the sentence until it is mended, is the best possible teacher. Perhaps in your own family circle you may find some to do this good office. The fault thus indicated, and at once amended, is not readily forgotten afterwards. When the same word recurs, you remember the fault and avoid it, until after a while you will find the right pronunciation or reading as familiar to you as was the wrong one. To this, however, perseverance is needful. Errors entertained from childhood are not banished in a day. The lesson must be repeated daily, until no pause for reflection *how* to speak is manifest. When you have attained to this the fault is conquered.

Positive faults removed, the next step will be to acquire the accomplishments. You have learned what *not* to do, you will next learn what *to do*.

The most frequent faults are imperfect articulation, provincialisms, bad management of the voice, monotony, absence of emphasis, and emphasising in the wrong place.

A few words on each of these.

Imperfect *articulation*, its causes and its cure, have been already treated of.

Provincial *pronunciation* has the same origin; early associations become so much a habit that you are unconscious of their presence. A listener, not from the same part of the country, can alone detect the presence of these provincialisms and set you to mending them. Both this and imperfect articulation are of all faults the most difficult to remove, and they can be conquered only by patience and perseverance. It is not the work of a day, or a week; months, or even years, may be required thoroughly to subdue them.

The *management of the voice* is a point of very great importance in reading. There is, first, the regulation of the breath. You cannot breathe, while reading, without a perceptible pause, and more or less of alteration in the *tone* of the voice, produced by the change from the empty to the full lung affecting the pressure upon the delicate organs of speech. Hence the necessity for so regulating the breath that it may be drawn at the right moment. Where sentences are not very long, there is no great difficulty in breathing at the close of a sentence; but sometimes sentences are extended through many lines, and the sense requires that the voice should be evenly sustained from the beginning to the end. In such a case you must breathe before its conclusion. The effort will be least perceptible if you seize a convenient moment for a pause, which by a little art might be made to appear as a pause required by the subject, and thus an operation really wanted for your own relief may, by ingenuity, add efficiency to the reading, relieving the monotony of sound and giving time to the listener to follow the sense, which in such cases is usually involved in a wilderness of words. But there is one rule for the management of breathing which is equally applicable to all occasions. *Invariably breathe through the nostrils, and not through the mouth.* This is the golden rule for reading and for speaking. If you do not observe this rule, your utterance will be a series of spasmodic gasps. Breathing through the nostrils, the air is slowly admitted, the lungs expand, and the chest rises with an equable motion that prevents the voice from quivering and its tones from changing abruptly.

At all times the voice requires to be kept under control. Some readers do not speak out, but as many

are unable to keep rein upon their voices. Both are faults of almost equal degree. Both may be natural defects, incapable of cure; but far more frequently they are the results of bad training, or no training, in early youth. In such cases the cure is not difficult. Simply *to speak out* should be the first lesson. Go into a room alone, or, still better, into a field, and read aloud at the top of your voice; thus you will learn what power of voice is in you and ascertain what you can do, if need be. If you find your voice weak, repeat the process day by day, for weeks or months, and its strength will certainly be increased, sufficiently, at least, for all the purposes of ordinary reading. If your breathing is short, that, too, will be strengthened by the same exercise; and I have found no little benefit from a practice which seems rather formidable at first, namely, reading aloud as you walk up hill. Not merely does this strengthen the lungs, but it teaches you the scarcely less important acquirement of regulating the supply of the breath to the voice, upon which you must depend mainly for ease in reading. To husband the breath is in itself an art, for if you pour out too much, you exhaust the lungs and must replenish them before a proper pause in the sentence permits of it, to the equal annoyance of your audience and of yourself. You may measure your capacity in this respect by taking a full inspiration, and then at regular intervals counting one, two, three, &c., and the number you can thus express at one breath, without refilling the chest, will show you, not only the power of your lungs, but also the control which you have over them in regulating the exit of the breath. Make a note of the number to which you attain at the beginning of your training, and compare it from time to time with present

capacities, and you will see what has been your progress.

But not only must you acquire *power* of voice, you must learn also to *regulate* the voice. This is an accomplishment far more difficult than mere strength of voice, as may be seen by the comparative infrequency of the attainment. How many persons, in all other respects good readers, are wanting in the power of *intonation*. They read right on, perhaps with a fine, full, sonorous, and even musical voice, that is in itself very pleasing, but which we find to be a monotone. Let this be ever so rich or sweet in itself, it palls by its monotony. The ear soon longs even for a discord to disturb that smooth stream of sound which, delightful at first, after a while becomes wearisome, and, in the end, positively painful. Only one degree worse than this is a weak or dissonant voice. Whatever yours may be, you must strive industriously to avoid monotony and cultivate flexibility of the organs of speech and variety of tone. Almost every sentence requires a change of the voice, according to the thought it utters. The tones of the voice are the natural expression of the mind—the natural language of the emotions—understood by all, felt by all, exciting the sympathies of all, appealing equally to all people of all countries and of all classes. Unless you can express, by the *tones* of your voice, the emotions which the printed page before you is designed to convey, you cannot perform your function of interpreter between the author and the audience, and you will fail to achieve the very purpose of your art.

Closely scanned, you will discover that this is very nearly the measure of accomplishment in the art of reading. *Excellence* consists in the command of *tone*.

The presence of this power will compensate for the absence of many other good qualities ; its absence will not be compensated by the presence of all other excellencies. Clear articulation, correct pronunciation, accurate accentuation, and the graces of a rich voice well managed, are not substitutes for those tones that express the emotions and ally sound with sense. *Tone* of the voice resembles expression of the countenance. How often have you admired a face that had not a single faultless feature, because it possessed the undefinable charm of *expression*. So it is with readers. Where the mind flashes and sparkles in the voice, the listener first forgives, and then forgets, the gravest deficiencies in other requirements of the art.

Therefore, cultivate *tone*. It is not a faculty you can acquire, because it is the result of certain characteristics of the mind ; but it may be *educated*. Indeed, education is necessary, not only to expand it, but to train it in the right direction. If you enjoy the mental capacity, you may want the physical power to express the feelings perfectly. The largest emotion in your own breast would be dwarfed when expressed by a thin small voice. Nevertheless, when the faculty is not altogether wanting—and such a case is extremely rare—it is capable of indefinite, though not unlimited, improvement. The physical organs may be strengthened by judicious use, and the mind itself may be trained to a more rapid, as well as a more energetic, expression of its emotions. Submit yourself to a series of lessons set to yourself, and repeated to yourself, if you have not a friend who will hear and correct them. Begin with the reading of a few pages of some composition calculated to kindle strong emotions, and when, by frequent repetition, you

have brought out the full meaning, turn to others in which the emotions to be expressed are more subtle. Having mastered these, advance to the still more delicate shades of meaning that require to be expressed by the slightest variations of tone.

Thus much being achieved, your work will be more than half accomplished; the foundations will be laid upon which you will, with small comparative difficulty, advance to the next stage of self-instruction in the art of reading.

LETTER XV.

EMPHASIS.

EMPHASIS is next to be studied, and it is entirely within the reach of self-attainment. Tone must, to some extent, depend upon physical and mental qualifications; but emphasis may be acquired by all. It is simply a stress laid upon words to which it is desired to attract the special attention of the listener, and the art of reading is not acquired until—

First, emphasis is placed upon the right words.

Secondly, the right amount of emphasis is given to each word; and,

Thirdly, emphasis is not given to wrong words.

It is very difficult to describe emphasis by language. It is not precisely a loud sound, nor a lengthened sound, nor a pause, nor a peculiar tone, although it partakes something of all of these. If you do not clearly understand what it is, you may recognise it by reading half-a-dozen lines of the first book you open, uttering each word in the same manner, without the slightest change of expression, and giving to particles and nouns the self-same value; you will thus discover what language would be if pronounced without emphasis. Read them now in your usual manner, and you will find that, instinctively, without so designing, you pass some words glibly over the tongue, almost stringing them together, and to others you give a marked prominence, by an

effort, partly mental, partly physical, sometimes called a *stress*. That is emphasis, and, next to tone, the right use of it is necessary to good reading.

In mastering emphasis, then, you must first learn to place it upon the right words. How may you do this ?

Writers and lecturers on elocution profess to prescribe many rules for the purpose, which they expect you to commit to memory, and apply when you are reading. I will not dispute the correctness of these rules ; perhaps it is in unconscious accordance with them that we read rightly ; but I am sure that no person ever reads *by* rule, even if he reads *according* to rule. A reader who should beat about in his memory for rules for reading, and pause to apply them, however rapidly he might perform the process, would be a halting reader ; certainly he would never read from his mind, but only from his book, and there would be a pedantic stiffness and slowness, more displeasing to an audience than wrong reading. I shall not trouble you with the reproduction of rules for that which, after all, is more the work of good taste, but content myself with a few hints how you may best cultivate this important ingredient in the art of reading.

Need I repeat that you must understand thoroughly what you are reading ? Without this, it is impossible that you can lay the emphasis rightly ; and if you rightly understand, you will emphasise well, by a natural impulse and unconsciously. But the faculty of rightly and quickly apprehending a writer's meaning is so rare that you cannot rely upon the possession of it. You must not be disheartened if you discover that it is but feeble in you. The degrees of its power are infinite, as various as there are men ; few can boast of its perfect enjoyment ; as it is a faculty capable of education, let a sense

of its weakness in yourself serve only to stimulate you to put it in training, by the simple process of reading a sentence from some great author and setting what you suppose to be its meaning in your own words. Be not content with *thinking* what that meaning is, or you will be sure to skip the difficulties, but express it audibly, or, which is better, because surer, write it. This, often repeated, will work speedy improvement in the accuracy and rapidity with which you will catch, from a glance at his words, what the author designed to convey.

But it is not enough to know what words should be emphasised. You should study also what *amount* of emphasis to give to each. The soul of reading is variety. Scarcely any two words in a sentence require precisely the same quantity of emphasis. You may readily satisfy yourself of the necessity for varied stress on various words by reading a sentence aloud, but uttering the words to be emphasised with the same measure of emphasis. The effect will be ludicrous. The purpose of emphasis is to impress upon the listener's mind the ideas to which it is desired to arrest his attention in proportion to their relative importance. In printing, this object is partially accomplished by the use of *italic*; but these italics do not convey different degrees of expression, and in this respect an author perused in print is vastly less effective and interesting than when well read aloud. In writing, the same feeble attempt to supply the place of emphasis is made by lines under the words on which a stress is designed to be laid, the number of dashes indicating the writer's notions of the degree of emphasis he would have used had he been speaking. This is one step in advance of the italic of the printers, which admits of no variations, and both fall far short of

the infinite flexibility of the voice. But the "dashes" of the writer and the *italics* of the printer remind me of a danger to which all who use emphasis are extremely liable. If you are given to "dashing" your words, doubtless you will have found it to be a growing habit. Having emphasised so many, you are compelled to emphasise so many more, in order to preserve their proportionate importance in relation to the rest, until your letters are ruled over like a music-book; thus, trying to be very forcible, you have become very feeble. So it is with authors who indulge in *italics*; the appetite grows with gratification, until the number of them destroys their effect. The same fault is not uncommon with readers who emphasise over much. Here, too, the power of the stress is lost if it is overlaid, for much emphasis is even more disagreeable than none. You will be required to keep constant watch and ward over yourself, or ask indulgent friends to notify your fault to you, if you would avoid a habit whose growth is imperceptible, and which, once acquired, is extremely difficult to be thrown aside.

The best practice for the mastery of *emphasis* is to read a sentence, ponder upon its meaning, see that you understand it, or think you do; then with a pencil score the words on which the greatest stress should be laid. Read it aloud, emphasising the words so marked, and those only. Then score in like manner, but with a shorter "dash," such words as require a lesser degree of emphasis. Read again, observing the two degrees of emphasis. Repeat the process a third and even a fourth time, until you have exhausted all the words that appear to you to require any stress to be laid upon them.

This is the first lesson. After a while you may spare

yourself the tediousness of repeated readings of the same sentence, by thus scoring with lines of different lengths the words to be emphasised in whole paragraphs, pages, and sections. But score them thus while reading silently, and afterwards read the whole aloud, pencil in hand ; the necessity for expression and the judgment of your ear will combine to test to a considerable extent the accuracy of your previous mental exercise ; and as you read, you should improve the score by additions and corrections, according to the discoveries you make of errors and omissions, and this do until you are satisfied with the reading, and the whole is marked as you would utter it.

But not for a final closing. As you advance in the study and practice of the art of reading, you should from time to time revert to the pages that preserve your earlier impressions of the emphasis to be bestowed upon them, and repeat the reading, for the purpose of learning, not only what progress you have made, but how your better knowledge has changed your first views. At each of such readings, alter the scoring according to your new conceptions ; you will thus measure your advancement, which mere memory will not enable you to do.

All this will appear very easy, and perhaps of very little interest or utility. But, in truth, it is by no means an easy task. Before you make trial of it, you will think that any schoolboy might mark the words to which emphasis should be given in reading. At the first trial such will probably be your own reflection, and you will use your pencil with a rapidity extremely flattering to your self-complacency. But, on the second or third repetition, you will begin to discover that you had been moving too fast ; you will doubt the correctness of some of your readings ; other meanings will present them-

selves ; you will be obliged to question closely the author's intent, that you may solve your doubts ; this more minute inspection will reveal new difficulties, not merely of meaning, but as to the proper manner of expressing the meaning, and you will find yourself engaged, perhaps, in a task of elaborate criticism. Not until you have reached this stage in the study of the art of reading, will you fully comprehend its extent and value. You may have been accustomed to look upon it as merely a graceful mechanical accomplishment ; you will now discover that it is a high mental attainment, demanding the cultivation and exercise of the loftiest intellectual powers.

LETTER XVI.

PAUSE—PUNCTUATION—MANAGEMENT OF THE
BREATH—INFLECTION.

THOROUGH understanding of what you read is essential to the right use of emphasis in reading. You must know perfectly what you are going to express, or it will be impossible to give to it the true expression. But not only is it necessary for you to understand—you must seize the meaning with such rapidity that the conception of the author may be apprehended in the momentary interval between the entrance of the words at the eye and their exit through the lips. Remember that this is the utmost limit of time permitted to you when you read aloud something you had not previously studied. Yet, immeasurably brief as is this interval, it suffices for ordinary purposes, and for compositions not pregnant with thought. But, to accomplish it, you must learn to keep your eye always *in advance* of your lips; you must actually read one line while uttering another. If you did not so, how possibly could you give the right expression to the beginning of the sentence, knowing not the purport of the entirety of it? In practice, the art is not so difficult as it appears in description. The worst readers exercise it to some extent, and experienced readers do it so unconsciously, that they are probably not aware what a wonderful process it is. I can suggest to you no rules for its study or acquisition. I can recom-

mend only persevering practice. At first you will doubtless find yourself grievously in fault in your reading. You will commence sentences, especially if long ones, with expression utterly unsuited to the meaning as developed at their close. When you find this, try back and read the same sentence rightly, with the aid of your better knowledge of its purport. By degrees you will discover that eye and mind may be trained to travel onward in advance of the lips so far and fast that, when one sentence is concluded, the next will be given to your tongue fully prepared for utterance.

It will not do to pause while your eye thus travels forward, unless the matter you read admits of it. A long pause is extremely displeasing to hearers, for it conveys an impression of incapacity to pronounce a word, or indicates a suppressed stammer. But, with cautious exercise of judgment, you might avail yourself of the proper pauses to lengthen the period allowed for the forecasting of the eye, where a sentence is of unusual length or complication. The judicious use of this contrivance I must leave to your own good taste and correct ear ; there is no fixed measure of it—nothing that can be reduced to *rule*.

I come now to those *pauses*, or rests in the flow of speech, which in printing and writing are clumsily represented by *stops*. The signs are eight, viz., the comma, the semicolon, the colon, the full stop, the note of interrogation, the note of admiration, the hyphen, and the dash. Schoolbooks and other treatises on elocution give you explicit directions for the measurement of these various signals, telling you that you should count one for a comma, two for a semicolon, and so forth.

Such rules are worthless ; they fail utterly in practice. So various are the rests required in reading, that no variety of notation would serve to indicate them. The comma may be repeated half a dozen times in a sentence, and on each occasion a different length of pause may be required. So it is with the other “stops”; they tell you, in fact, nothing more than that the author, or rather the printer, is of opinion that at the points of insertion the sentence is divisible into parts more or less perfectly. They are introduced with little or no reference to their use in reading aloud—how little, indeed, you might discover by taking up the first book that lies before you and reading the first page at which you chance to open it. You will find that the stops do not help you much and often are a hindrance. Authors exhibit the strangest vagaries in punctuation. You would be amused and amazed at many of the manuscripts and proofs that vex the eyes of editors. Often the stops are scattered with such profusion that half-a-dozen words are nowhere permitted to live in harmony without this forcible separation from their fellows. Sometimes the right “stop” is inserted in the wrong place, as if of malice aforethought ; by others, the wrong stop is continuously employed in the right place—as a colon where there should be a comma—to the infinite vexation of sensitive readers, who pull up suddenly or make preparation for a halt, just where they ought not to do so. You must know that the follies of the author in this respect are usually corrected by the compositor, or the press-reader ; but the author is not always content to abide by that better judgment, and insists on his own punctuation being preserved ; and even if so corrected, the work is necessarily done imperfectly, and, as I have

previously stated, with a view to the division of the sentences rather than to the reading of them aloud.

For these reasons you must make your own punctuation both in place and in length of pause, being guided by the meaning of the words, by your *sense of fitness*, by your ear, and by the requirements of your chest and throat. These last should be permitted to prevail as rarely as possible, because, if not also called for by the meaning of what you are reading, they fall disagreeably upon the ears of the listener; and it is important that you should early learn to regulate your breathing, so that you may inspire at the moment when otherwise you would make a pause of equal length. Now this is an art to be acquired by practice, and which I may as well describe to you in this place, as being intimately connected with the pauses intended to be indicated by punctuation.

The *management of the breath* is almost as needful to good reading as the management of the voice. The primary requisite is to draw breath as *infrequently* as possible, and this you can accomplish only by making your breath hold out as long as possible. How to do this? First, when you draw breath, fill your chest; then, expire slowly, and do not breathe again until exhausted. There is an art in breathing properly, and it consists in breathing through the nose, and not through the mouth. The uses of breathing through the nose are many. The air is filtered in its passage by the bristles that line the nostrils, and the particles of dust floating about are thus prevented from touching the sensitive organs of the throat and you are saved many an inconvenient cough: the air traverses a small, long, and very warm tube, before it reaches the

windpipe, by which its temperature is raised to that of the delicate membranes on which it there impinges, and thus their irritation, or even inflammation, is prevented. If you breathe through the mouth, the air rushes in, carrying with it impurities that make you cough by their contact with the mucous membrane, while the cold irritates the sensitive organ and produces temporary inconvenience, possibly protracted illness. There is another result of breathing through the mouth, peculiarly unpleasant to readers and speakers, the drying of the lips, tongue, and throat, an effect produced also by nervousness, and which is the consequence of the contraction and closing of the ducts from the salivary glands. Accustom yourself, therefore, to breathe through the nostrils; although a more lengthened process and requiring a longer pause, it is far less disagreeable to a listener than the gasps, followed often by tickling and a cough, that are exhibited by the speaker who breathes through his mouth.

Having taken your breath rightly, there is some art in the right use of it. You must husband it with care, and give no more of it to each distinct sound you utter than is necessary for its perfect expression. You can regulate the sound only by regulating the breath. Practice will strengthen you in this performance, and you may try your progress in it from time to time by counting one, two, three, &c., at measured intervals, and noting how many numbers you can thus count with one inspiration. The use of this will soon be apparent in practice, for you will come to the end of your voice before you have reached the end of the sentence, and then you will be compelled to mar its meaning and annoy your audience by pausing when the sense of what you are

reading requires that you should link the words closely together. But, having acquired facility for extending one breath over a long sentence, if need be, you are not required always to speak till no breath remains. On the contrary, you should seize every convenient opportunity for performing the operation in a right place, lest you should be compelled to do so in a wrong one. Choose such pauses as should be indicated by what is called the "full stop" in writing. Thus you will learn to enjoy the entire command of your voice, and the best practice for that purpose is to read daily a few pages, with the sole design of mastering the process I have endeavoured to describe.

Nearly allied to Emphasis and Pause is *Inflection*. I mean by this term the rise and fall of the voice, a variation essential to the avoidance of monotony and the securing of an attentive ear from your audience. Some skill is required for the right regulation of this. The limit within which the voice may range is not wide; the movement must be determined, partly by what you read, partly by ear. There are no rules to which you can safely trust for guidance. I can do little more to help you than tell you what to avoid. There is a frequent fault of which you should beware. Many persons, trying to escape from a level voice, fall into the still more unpleasant practice of *speaking in waves*; that is to say, the voice is made to rise and fall by a regular swelling and sinking at precisely even periods—an utterance difficult to describe in words, but which you will doubtless recognise readily from this rude comparison of it. The right use of Inflection is one of the most subtle ingredients in the art of reading. If it be judiciously employed, however slightly, it gives a spirit

and meaning to the words that win even unwilling ears. The voice, raised at some fitting moment, sends the thought straight into the mind that is opened expectantly. Judiciously lowered, it touches the emotions. There is no fixed rule either for raising or dropping the voice. A vague notion prevails that the punctuation has something to do with it; that you ought to lower the voice at the end of a sentence; that a full stop should be notice to you, not only to halt, but to drop gradually down into silence. This is a grievous error and so common as to be almost a national fault. It is remarkably shown in our manner of speaking, and this will serve as an excellent illustration of my meaning. The English usually drop their voices at the end of a sentence; other nations, and the French especially, usually raise it. In other words, we talk with the downward inflection, and they with the upward inflection. The consequence is, that their conversation appears much more lively, and their talk is more readily intelligible to a foreigner, than is ours. The last words of an Englishman's sentences are often unintelligible, because his voice falls until it dies away in a sort of guttural murmuring. And, as we talk, so too often do we read. We drop the voice at the end of every sentence, beginning the next sentence some half-a-dozen notes higher and several degrees louder. Now, the art of reading requires just the reverse of this. Instead of lowering the voice at the end of a sentence, the general rule should be to keep it up, and even slightly to raise it. Thus it is that the attention of an audience is sustained and a liveliness is imparted to your discourse far beyond the apparent simplicity of the means adopted. Try it; read a page, using the English downward inflection, and

then read the same page, using the upward inflection at the end of each sentence, and mark the contrast upon your own energies. Ask a friend to do the like, and listen; you will instantly recognise the superior life and vigour infused into the composition. Repeat the experiment in a large room, before a numerous audience, and you will find that, while it is very difficult for the ear to seize the words uttered in the downward inflection, the entire sentence is clearly and readily caught by the most distant listener when the upward inflection is used—that is to say, when the voice is made to rise, instead of being permitted to fall, at the end of a sentence.

I remember once being at a rehearsal at Drury-lane, with one of our great actors. I expressed surprise that he did not speak louder, as it seemed to me that his voice was not raised much beyond that of ordinary conversation; yet it filled the house and came back to us. He explained to me that it was really so. “If I were to speak twice as loud,” he said, “I should not be heard half so well. To be heard by a large audience; you have only to speak slowly and to raise your voice at the end of every sentence.” It was a lesson not to be forgotten, and, having tried and proved it, I recommend it to you.

LETTER XVII.

ATTITUDE—INFLUENCE OF THE MENTAL OVER THE PHYSICAL POWERS.

THE hints that have been offered so far relate to reading generally; they are designed to assist you in the development of those physical powers, without which intellectual capacity fails to express itself. The right management of the voice is as necessary as the right understanding of that which the voice is to utter. Both are indispensable; both require persistent study; neither will compensate for defects in the other, and, in influence over a miscellaneous audience, it is doubtful whether a reading mechanically good would not surpass a reading intellectually good. However this may be, do not place too much reliance upon the virtues you *mentally* infuse into your reading, to the neglect of the graces with which voice and manner will invest them. To read well, you must do both well.

For the purpose of controlling your breath, and thus governing your voice, some attention must be given to *attitude*, and fortunately the position that is best adapted for utterance is that which is most easy to yourself and most agreeable to your audience. You should sit as uprightly as possible, or, if that be inconvenient, inclining very gently in the chair, the arms well thrown back, so as to give to the chest the fullest and freest expansion, and the head erect, so as to remove all pressure from the

throat, where the delicate organs of the voice are playing. Not only do you thus exercise them with the greatest ease to themselves, but the sounds they produce are sent most audibly and distinctly to the farthest range of listeners. If you stoop forward, bending over your book, you cannot take a full breath, you cannot regulate your tones, you are unable to make your breathing coincident with the necessary pauses of the discourse, and your voice is sent down, to be muffled by your book, or stifled upon the floor, instead of being flung forth, in a flowing stream of sound, to reach the ears of the most distant of the assembled circle. If you want to measure the amount of voice required to touch those farthest from you, the process is easy enough. No intricate calculation, not even a mental estimate of space, is necessary. Nothing more is needed than that you should look at the most distant of the persons you desire to address, and instinctively, without effort or calculation of your own, your voice will take the pitch of loudness requisite to make *him* hear.

But you will probably say that, however useful these rules for attitude may be to speakers, they are inapplicable to readers; for how, you will ask, is it possible, sitting upright, or reclining gently back in a chair, with head erect, to read a book without holding it straight before the eye and consequently eclipsing your face entirely? I confess there is some difficulty at first in accomplishing this feat, but it is to be acquired by a little practice. Two processes are requisite to the performance. First, you must master the art of keeping the eye and mind in advance of the tongue; secondly, you must learn, while the head is erect, to read by turning the eyes down to a book placed *below* you, but yet at the angle most

convenient to sight and which you must ascertain at the moment, for it varies with the nature of the composition, the size of the type, and even the quality of the paper. If your audience did not look at you when reading, this position of the eye would, if unrelieved, be inconvenient only to yourself. But an audience must look *at* you, as well as be looked at *by* you, or you will not secure their attention. A reader, you must remember, is not a mere conduit pipe, to convey the words of the book to the minds of the listeners : a good reader communicates directly with his audience ; he makes the ideas of the author so much his own, when transmitted through his mind, that they come from him animated and inspired by something of his own living spirit, so that the minds of the listeners feel themselves in communion with his mind, and there is a consciousness that the intercourse is intellectual and not mechanical merely. Strive, then, that your reading shall sound and seem as little like reading, and as much like speaking, as possible : give to what you say, and to the manner of saying it, the air of being the utterance of your own mind rather than the mere repetition of the production of another mind, and this you can accomplish only by repeatedly raising your eyes from the book and looking at the audience while you complete the sentence which the eye and the mind, *travelling before the tongue*, have committed to the memory.

I have now said all that occurs to me as likely to be useful to you respecting that portion of the Art of Reading which depends upon the physical processes. But in the cultivation of these powers you must not forget that they are intimately allied with the intellectual processes. No single movement of the smallest muscle employed in the art of reading is purely mechanical ; it is governed

more or less by mental emotions, with which it vibrates in a mysterious sympathy you can neither prompt nor control. The voice will express in tones and in tremors the feelings that are flashing through the brain, and the main object of all your studies and strivings will be, not so much to acquire something new, as to remove the bad habits by which the natural expression is impeded. You will have a great deal more to *unlearn* than to learn. Your endeavour from the beginning should be to go back to nature—to have faith in her—to find out what in your practice is artificial, and what is true, and by persevering effort to emancipate yourself from the slavery of habit. In these suggestions I have sought to consult nature alone, and I have given very little attention to the “rules” which professional writers and teachers have promulgated. It is not that it can be asserted of any of them, examined individually, that they are erroneous; they err only in that they attempt to reduce to rule an art which cannot, like science, be reduced to rule. I challenge the proof to be thus tried. Let a page of any book be read strictly according to the *rules* of any treatise on, or teacher of, elocution; it will be found intolerably starched, ungainly and stupid. Continually the infinite variations of the thought to be expressed will enforce a departure from the letter of the rule. Either the rule must bend to the meaning, or the meaning will be murdered by the rule. Are not rules, that exist only by elasticity such as this, more likely to hinder than to help? Reflection and experience have combined to convince me that so it is, and therefore I have ventured, in defiance of the authorities, to throw aside the conventional code and have endeavoured to trace out for you a new path to the Art of Reading.

There is danger always, and with all of us, that we may exaggerate the importance of any subject that has engaged much of our attention, and therefore I am desirous of strengthening the views I have been so many years trying to promulgate, as to the necessity for making the art of reading a branch of education in all schools, and by all classes, by reference to some higher authorities. I will cite two passages from two of our ablest journals, which express, in more powerful language than I can command, very nearly the views I have long advocated. The first is from the *Saturday Review*.

But the clergy are not the only class who read badly, though, since reading forms so large a portion of their duty, their deficiencies are especially conspicuous. Bad reading is far more common than good among all classes, from the charity children, whose monotonous twang in the responses of the Liturgy tortures every sensitive ear, up to the most refined and best educated. It is not merely that, in the art of reading aloud, as in every other application of knowledge to practice, the number of those who attain excellence is a very small percentage on the total number of persons who practise it at all. The point in which the art of reading seems exceptional is, that the average skill in doing what everyone does more or less is disgracefully small. One reason for this is obvious enough—it is not considered a part of education to teach children to read aloud. Some few schools, perhaps, are exceptions to this rule of universal neglect; and there are men who call themselves professors of elocution, and undertake to remedy a mischief which need never have been done. But in the great majority of instances, a boy, during his school years, not only is not taught how to read well, but actually learns to read badly. Construing Greek and Latin authors, in the orthodox school fashion, is about the best possible means for giving a boy the habit of reading as if he was a mere machine, neither knowing nor caring for the sense of the words his tongue is uttering. Three or four words of Latin, then the corresponding English, alternated through several sentences, with blunders and stoppages intermixed, or, at best, a hesitation every now and then because he

is not quite sure of the right order or right meaning of the words before him—this is the style of reading which a schoolboy practises, day after day for several years of his life, just at the age when habits are most easily and permanently formed. This may be necessary, possibly, to the acquirement of Greek and Latin, but at any rate, there is no doubt of the effect produced as regards the reading of English; and on the face of it, one might almost wonder that anyone who has passed through the ordinary education of a gentleman ever so far escapes the evil influence of it as to read aloud even respectably well. The same remarks are true of girls learning modern languages, though perhaps in a less degree. The construing period does not last so long with them, and the construing method is not so vigorously applied to French and German. One does not, however, hear ladies read aloud so often as men; and the different quality of the female voice makes their defects less striking to the ear than the bad reading of rougher-toned men. The first requisite towards obtaining a generation able to read clearly and intelligibly is a little care in schoolmasters and other teachers. Let the pupils construe, if it must be so, their Latin lessons in a manner heart-breaking to those who care for the sense or sound of the author's language; but then let them be also accustomed to read the same or other books as they ought to be read—with due attention to stops, construction, and emphasis. If this is not done universally—if boys are not made to read history, notes and references on the lessons before them, and everything else that comes in their way, in an intelligent manner—special instruction in elocution will be of very little use, particularly if it is deferred till the boy has become a man. He has then to conquer the habits which have grown upon him ever since he first went to school—perhaps fifteen years before—and the task is become a difficult, almost a hopeless one.

But it is worth while to inquire why people need to be taught the art of reading at all. What is the difference between speaking and reading? How is it that, for twenty persons whose tones and expression are natural enough when they are uttering their own thoughts in conversation, hardly one can read aloud in an intelligent and straightforward manner? The explanation does not lie in the fact that a man, in speaking, uses his own words, and in reading, the words of another, for men do not seem to read their own writings better than other people's. One of the commonest excuses made by

clergymen for preaching extempore is, that they cannot deliver a written sermon with equal effect. The excuse is not altogether a valid one, for not a few masters of the art contrive to make their reading as effective as any speaking could be; but no doubt it is more difficult so to do. Nor is the reason to be found in the restraint of natural motion and gesture imposed by the necessity of keeping the eye fixed, more or less continually, on the book or paper to be read from; for a person who can recite well is quite as rare as one who can read well. Even on the stage, where the first business of the performer is, or ought to be, elocution in its various branches, one very seldom hears a speech which consists of a simple narration of facts, or the like, and is not strongly marked by some emotion or comic peculiarity, delivered in a natural manner. The difficulty of reading aloud, or of reciting, seems to consist in keeping to a fixed form of words which are not the spontaneous expression of the reader's thoughts. His mind is already occupied in gathering the actual words which the tongue is to utter—from the book in the one case, by means of the eye, from the memory in the other case—and finds some difficulty in attending at the same time to their meaning, and to the expression which ought consequently to be given to them. In speaking, on the contrary, words and expression all form part of the clothing given to the thoughts. A man knows what he means by the words in which he gives utterance to his own thought, and the tone and emphasis are the audible expression of that meaning. Of course he may be at a loss for words, or he may form a wrong notion of the impression that will be produced on others by certain words and tones; but to his own satisfaction, at least, he can give his words the expression he intends, and he cannot fail to know what he means to convey by them. In reading, however, the case is very different. The reader has first to take in the words before his eyes, and then to consider what meaning they are intended by the author to have, in order that he may give the proper tone and expression to his utterance of them. A good reader, then, is one who keeps his mind continually engaged in discovering the sense of the words on the page, and so making them his own as to give them the expression which he attaches to them. It is of course bad reading, in the judgment of the hearers, when the reader gives to the words an expression which they think unsuitable; but the reader himself is striving to perform his task properly, and deserves some credit for

the attempt, however unsuccessful. Really bad reading is when the reader's mind is almost passive, employing only energy enough to decipher the printed letters and instruct the voice how to make corresponding sounds. Good reading is, in truth, no slight mental exertion—bad reading is as nearly mechanical as any process can be to which the mind must bring a certain amount of knowledge. The latter, some may think, must be far less trouble, and the former not worth the pains that must be bestowed. But it fortunately happens, to counterbalance this, that bad reading, if easier to the mind, is far more tiring to the body, because it does not exercise equally what, for want of a more appropriate word, we must call the muscles of the voice. Some are used too much, some not at all, and the result is speedy fatigue. The voice of a good reader, on the contrary, is worked in obedience to an intelligent and ever-active will, and therefore in the manner calculated to produce and preserve the greatest efficiency. Practical proof of the advantage of good reading may be seen by anyone who has a clerical acquaintance. *Cæteris paribus*, a bad reader will always be more fatigued by a Sunday morning service than a good one.

I reserve the other for my next letter ; this one having already exceeded the permitted space.

LETTER XVIII.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

I CLOSED my last letter with an extract from the *Saturday Review*. I commence the present letter with the promised extract from the *Times*, both being cited because they teach, in better language and with more powerful argument than I can command, some of the lessons I have endeavoured to convey to you. Thus, then, the *Times* treats of Reading as a necessary part of education for the Church. It is not less necessary to training for the Law, and every word here applied to the Clergy is equally applicable to the Lawyers.

This strange discrepancy between the means and the end, between the labours of our bishops and the *ridiculus mus* we too often hear in our churches, is all the stranger, inasmuch as a measure of success is actually attained when the matter happens to be in voluntary hands. When a congregation has the appointment of its own minister, it generally takes care to choose a man with a good voice, manner, and utterance. Indeed, the congregations that happen to possess this power are invariably the objects of much clerical satire for their bad taste in preferring a man whom they can hear and understand. Again, when a body of trustees have an interest in filling a pulpit well, or when it is a great object to the incumbent himself that the sittings should be taken, the nominee, whether incumbent or curate, is generally found to be a man with power of eloquence or grace of elocution. The incumbent of a good London church or a fashionable chapel is generally beset with stout, healthy gentlemen from the country, whose life-ambition it has been to astonish a well-bred audience with the majesty or the sweetness of their tones. His

practised ear detects the vulgar or the ridiculous in the provincial Boanerges, and the result is that if the delivery in our West-end churches is often feeble or monotonous, it seldom shocks by the extravagance of its errors. So elocution is made an object here, and downright vulgarity at least is excluded. On all occasions, indeed, where there is a power of choice, the voice and tone are among the first things considered. An ordinary congregation will tolerate almost anything in the clergyman; the only one thing they cannot bear is a dull, droning, stupid, heartless style, indicating that the reader does not himself feel what he reads, or heartily believe what he teaches. A clergyman may have been a toper, a *gourmand*, a flirt, a liar, a sportsman, a dancer of the most forbidden dances, or intemperate in his language—almost anything that society and public opinion reprobate; but if he has a good voice and graceful elocution, he will be elected over an utterly respectable grinder of prayers and sermons, and he will fill the church which the other would empty. The rural clergy console themselves for the empty pews by telling terrible stories of their Dissenting rivals, and terrible stories they can tell. We could fill a volume with schismatical biographies of a peculiar character. Certainly it is not pleasant for a learned Oxford divine, a first-class man, an essayist, perhaps a tutor and a professor, to be beaten out of the field by a drunkard, a rogue, a polygamist, or a downright impostor. But, granting the truth of all these scandals on the side of Dissent, they have a fearful recoil on the Establishment. How is it that good Mr. Mumble, the scrupulous Dr. Drone, and even the sanctimonious and exemplary Mr. Snarl, are vanquished in their own legal domains by such ignominious opponents? The answer is simple enough. The drunkard, the rogue, the polygamist, and the impostor talk as if, for the time at least, they felt what they said, and talk so well that the hearers forget all they know about them. They rise above themselves when they preach and pray. The rector sinks as much below himself. . . . Alas for the congregations! Who is there to look after them? Did the bishops but know with what anxiety they flock to church to hear for the first time the college fellow, or the purchaser of the reversion, or my lord's nephew, under whom they are to sit, perhaps for a generation! Smile as we will, it really is no joke poor Hodge, the ploughman, or Giles, his master, to be tied to one reader and preacher every Sunday of his mortal career, when that reader and preacher reads

and preaches very ill. It really is a great tyranny. If we read in the life of Nero that he bound his senate, under pain of death, to assemble in his palace once a month to sit out two hours of execrable fiddling, we should set it down as the last proof of patrician degradation and extinct tyranny. But all England is told that, as they value their immortal souls, they must sit out two hours, if not three, every Sunday, of the regulation reading and preaching, be it the worst possible. It is true that bold spirits resent the bondage, and go after strange preachers, but they are laid under the ban for it and excommunicated. They become Dissenters. Why? Simply because they refuse to come Sunday after Sunday to hear the worship of the Almighty done, as they cannot but feel it, by as mere a machine as the barrel organ in the gallery. Cannot the bishops do more? It is said, indeed, that some of the bishops can neither read nor preach themselves; that the examining chaplains do not know what good reading is; and that, even were it attempted to apply a test, the test would not be uniform throughout dioceses. Such objections, however, apply to all tests and examinations, and, indeed, to all superintendence, for there is no point upon which it is easy to obtain a sufficient and uniform rule. All we know is, that the existing kindness to the candidates is cruelty to the people. Better license a man to poison the bodies of Englishmen with drugs which he does not know how to mix or apply than confer upon him a sacred mission and absolute authority to lead the prayers his heart does not join in, and to win souls which he will really drive away. The priest is for the people, not the people for the priest; and if the priest be either physically or morally unfit for his work, let it be found out in time, and let him take to some trade which will require neither heart nor voice.

I proceed now to illustrate by examples the hints I have been suggesting. But I must preface my remarks by the assurance that very little indeed can be done for you upon paper. It is extremely difficult, more so even than I had anticipated when I commenced the task, to exhibit by any form of words, by any conventional signs, by any ingenuity of type, the manner in which ideas should be expressed, or the voice governed.

Only by an intelligent listener freely pointing out your faults, or a practised reader setting you an example, can you hope to learn much more than that in which alone it was my purpose to assist you, namely, in knowledge of what *you ought to do*, leaving the learning of *how to do it* to your own sagacity, the judicious aid of a friend, or the lessons of a tutor. The few illustrations which I am enabled so imperfectly to produce are, therefore, not designed so much to instruct you *how to read* as to make more apparent to you and impress on your memory the suggestions I have thrown out for your guidance in self-education in the art of reading. Had I desired more than this, I could not have accomplished it. Words will not express tones. No description will convey the right measure of emphasis, or the delicate inflections of the voice. Clearly comprehending the narrow limits within which the following lessons can aid you, I will ask you to accompany me, not in thought merely, but with voice, reading aloud the passages cited, in the manner indicated. Observe that *italic* is used where slight emphasis is required; SMALL CAPITALS where great stress is to be laid upon the word; the ordinary "points" or "stops" will indicate the pauses; the hyphen [-] a passage in the nature of an interjection, breaking the chain of the sentence and to be read in a different tone so as distinctly to mark the interval; and the dash [—] will mark the pauses that are not to be measured by the regular "stops."

You will remember that the rules that have been suggested for observance in good reading were arranged under the titles of Tone, Emphasis, Pause, Inflection. The following illustrations are designed to exhibit all of these.

I purposely select familiar passages. Take, then, a part of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, which Thelwall (the elder) considered to be one of the most difficult of readings, and an excellent test of the capacity or progress of his pupils.

First, read three or four verses right on, without any pause or expression whatever, merely *pronouncing the words* rightly. As thus :

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and God said Let there be light and there was light and God saw the light that it was good and God divided the light from the darkness and God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night And the evening and the morning were the first day.

This is a starting point from which you can measure the effects produced by the various kinds of expression.

Then read the same passage with *pauses*, but still without emphasis or tone. As thus :

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void ; and darkness was upon the face of the deep ; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light : and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good : and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

You will hence learn the precise value of those pauses which are so imperfectly indicated in writing and printing by punctuation. You will also discover the imperfections of our limited scale of "stops," and how impossible it is to observe them strictly. Above they are presented precisely as they appear in the authorised edition of the

Bible. Mark the rule laid down by the grammars, that you should count one for a comma, two for a semicolon, and so forth, and see how miserably it fails to express the meaning. Read the same passage now with the *natural pauses*, as required by the sense, and you will at once recognise the justice of the complaint preferred against the artificial system of punctuation. In the absence of any established series of signs for pauses, I will indicate them,—though imperfectly, I fear,—by lines between the words, the various lengths of which will rudely measure the various lengths of pause.

In the beginning—God created the heaven and the earth—
And the earth was without form—and void—and darkness was
upon the face of the deep—and the Spirit of God moved upon the
face of the waters—And God said—Let there be light—and
there was light—And God saw the light—that it was good—
And God divided the light from the darkness—And God called
the light Day—and the darkness he called Night—And the
evening and the morning were the first day.

Observe that, so far, your reading must be carefully limited to pronunciation and pause, purposely avoiding emphasis and variations of the voice. You should now read the same passage again, as before, but introducing *emphasis*. The words to be emphasised are printed in *italic*, SMALL CAPITALS and CAPITALS, according to the less or more of stress to be put upon them.

In the BEGINNING—GOD created the HEAVEN and the EARTH—
And the earth was without form and void—and darkness was upon
the face of the deep—and the SPIRIT of GOD moved upon the face
of the waters—And God said—Let there be LIGHT!—and
there WAS light—And God saw THE LIGHT—that it was GOOD
—And God divided the light from the darkness—And God called
the light DAY—and the darkness he called NIGHT—And the evening
and the morning were the first day.

You will now have learned the effect of *emphasis*. Repeat the experiment, adding to pause and emphasis the observance of *tone*, according to the hints given in a former letter. But it is impracticable to represent or even to suggest tone by any signs. I can only, therefore, so far prompt you as to say that the natural tone in which to express a grand and solemn theme is as deep, full, and rich as you can make it. Indeed, if you feel what you utter, the tone will, without an effort, express the emotion.

Once again read the passage, observing all the former graces of pause, emphasis and tone, adding to them *inflection* of the voice, which may be compared to the swell of an organ. The rise and fall of the sounds you utter, their swelling or sinking according to the requirements of the sense, are the crowning charm of good reading, for by them monotony is put to flight and the ears of the audience are caught and held. I have endeavoured to exhibit *inflection* by some intelligible signs; but I have been unable to devise to my own satisfaction any that would be within the compass of a printing-office to produce. I must be content, therefore, with a running commentary upon the successive sentences.

In the BEGINNING—GOD created the HEAVEN and the EARTH.

The voice should descend two or three notes at the word GOD, because it should be pronounced reverentially, and veneration expresses itself naturally in low rich notes.

Then it should rise and be sustained evenly to the end, followed by a long pause.

And *the earth* was without form and *void*—and *darkness* was

upon the face of the *deep*—And the SPIRIT OF GOD moved upon the *face* of the waters.

Here the voice is to be sustained throughout with no inflection, not even falling at the close. Only observe the pauses and the emphasis.

And GOD said—*Let there be LIGHT!*—And there *was* light.

Here the inflection changes thrice. Beginning with the tone and key of the previous sentence, these should be sustained to mark still more strongly the change to the tone of command, which should be uttered in a low and slow voice, very firmly, and with a marked stress on the word “Light.” It is important to observe that *this* word should be uttered with the upward inflection; that is to say, with the voice elevated above the pitch used in the former part of the sentence. Then follows a long pause, and then, in a tone considerably lower, the concluding sentence, strongly emphasising “*was*,” and gently dropping the voice (the downward inflection) to the end.

Then raise the voice to its former note for the next sentence.

And GOD saw *the light*—that it was *GOOD*—And GOD divided the *light* from the *darkness*—And God called *the light* *DAY*—and *the darkness* he called *NIGHT*—And the *evening* and the *morning* were the *FIRST* day.

Here you should mark the distinction between the first part, “And God saw,” &c., and the second part, “And God divided,” &c., by a slight change in tone, the latter part being spoken half a note lower than the first; and in both, the voice should gently fall at the close, the object being to break the monotony of a continued narrative, and also to give more prominence by contrast to the sentence that follows, which also must be read in the

same note throughout, relying for variety upon the emphasis and the pauses, which are very marked. Then comes a change. The narrative is completed; the story is told; you indicate this by a long pause, and then, in a different voice, descending one note at least, you conclude the passage.

I am conscious of the inefficiency of this verbal and typical illustration of the suggestions I had previously thrown out, and I fear that it will not be very intelligible to you. The difficulty of doing what I had designed is far greater than I had anticipated; and if you should find the lesson an obscure one, pass it over. I cannot, however, suffer it to rest here; I must adduce some further illustrations, although I shall be enabled to be more brief in explanation of them, and shall not need the repetitions unavoidable for the first explanation, in writing, of that which speech alone can properly convey.

LETTER XIX.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF TONE, EMPHASIS AND PAUSE.

SOME further illustrations will be necessary to enable you to comprehend clearly the hints I have thrown out to you. I felt considerable misgivings whether the device I had adopted for exhibiting the variations of utterance by help of the printer's art would not more puzzle than assist the reader. It is satisfactory to learn, however, that the plan has been sufficient for its purpose, and that readers have found no difficulty in following the instructions so conveyed. The same notation will be preserved throughout the following illustrations. But it will not be necessary to repeat the practice of successive readings of the same passage, each introducing an additional ornament, as in the lesson contained in the last letter. If that be read eight or ten times, strictly observing the method proposed, you cannot fail to arrive at the most perfect comprehension of the nature as well as the value of each of those requisites to the Art of Reading. I shall now, therefore, merely present the illustrations *as scored for practice*, and then endeavour to state the reasons for such readings; and those reasons will often serve as examples of former remarks; for, let it be a firm faith with you, that unless you can assign a reason for reading a passage in one way rather than in another way, you cannot be a *good* reader—you will read only by imitation and not by the impulse of your own mind.

And here I may tell you an anecdote that has been conveyed to me, which is interesting as confirmatory of an observation, made in a former letter, to the effect that, if a person reads badly, it is because he does not understand what he reads. That so it is appears from the fact, that almost everybody *talks* rightly. Rarely do we hear the wrong emphasis in conversation ; yet the very man who gives to every word he utters the right expression, when he is talking, will give the wrong expression to three-fourths of his words when he is reading. The reason of this strange defect is, that when he talks he understands what he is saying, and the voice echoes the mind ; when he reads, either his mind is not at work upon the words, or it does not catch at the moment the sense of what he reads, and reading becomes a mere mechanical operation—an utterance by rote—the words going in at the eye, and coming out at the tongue, without passing through the intelligent mind.

My informant is a sensible man, who has imbibed the modern heresy that reading is an accomplishment at least as desirable, and likely to be as useful in life, as singing, and accordingly he has spared no pains to preserve his children from learning to read badly. His notion is—and *he is right*—that the bad habits acquired in childhood, in the performance of the merely mechanical art of sounding printed words, without understanding the ideas they are designed to convey, are the foundation of bad reading in after life. Assuming this, he has taken reading as the test and measure of intelligence in children. Esteeming so highly the art of reading, it is natural that any experiences of others on the subject should interest him, and that any hints of which he approved should be conveyed to his family. Thinking well of some which he has found

in these letters, he has endeavoured to make a practical use of them, and they have been conveyed to his pupils as they appear here. The last letter, containing some illustrations of the previous suggestions, was accordingly produced to the family circle, when my informant bethought him that he would test the capacities of the little group around him by calling upon each to read the same passage from the Book of Genesis, marking in another volume, after the same fashion, the manner in which it was read by the child according to his own natural impulse, and then comparing them so as to ascertain how far the natural reading of the child coincided with the reading proposed in this essay. The test, he says, was perfect; precisely in proportion to the little reader's natural intelligence was the reading more or less in unison with that here suggested. He found by further trial that, where they read wrongly, invariably they did not understand the meaning of what they were reading; and one little boy, whose intelligence is remarkable, read the entire passage aloud for the first time, and his *natural and untaught* expression of it was found in almost precise accordance with the *studied and reasoned* mode of utterance which I had suggested. This experiment is interesting and valuable, because it was tried with children who had acquired no bad habits, and therefore it proves how much more nature does than art can do towards making a good reader, and confirms the assertion that the art of reading consists mainly in understanding what you read. The experiment could not have been tried by adults, because none are to be found who have not acquired some evil habits of reading in their school-days, which cleave to them still, or which they have been enabled to conquer only by calling in the aid of *art*.

I would earnestly recommend other parents to follow the example of my friend :—to keep vigilant guard over the first lessons in reading ; to prohibit the reading aloud of anything not understood, and to take *misreading* as a certain test of misunderstanding. Be sure that your pupil *understands*, and you may be assured that he will *read*.

I make no apology for this interposition. I was treating an old subject after a new fashion, and, as I proceeded, not only did new thoughts upon it arise in my own mind, but suggestions were sent to me by readers who took an interest in the theme. This, as I told you before, is not a formal treatise, but a friendly communication of the results of some experience and reflection on a subject whose real worth is only beginning to be acknowledged by the public.

There is not a better illustration of the suggestions that have been submitted to you than Hamlet's famous soliloquy. Its very familiarity will, perhaps, recommend it for practice, because it is almost certain to be associated in your mind with readings at school, and you will more readily see the propriety of one by contrast with the other. I preserve the same notation.

Remember that Hamlet has just seen the spirit of his father, who has told him that his father-in-law was a murderer. He is not quite assured whether or no it was "an honest ghost;" if it was not "an instrument of darkness" tempting him to a horrible crime. He is sorely perplexed, seeking eagerly for some assurance that the story supernaturally imparted to him was true.

Now, to read the soliloquy correctly, you must *feel* it, and to feel it you must throw your mind into much the same condition as that in which the mind of Hamlet is

supposed to be at the moment he is communing with himself—for it is a soliloquy, and not a speech addressed to others; and a soliloquy is only *thinking aloud*, and should be so read or acted. It is manifest, moreover, that he had been contemplating suicide as a refuge from doubts and perplexities. The voice should be low in tone, with sadness of expression; the utterances slow—the pauses long at first, for he is assumed to be reflecting.

TO BE—or NOT to be——*that is the question*——
 Whether 'tis *nobler* in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune——
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
 And—by opposing—*end* them?——TO DIE?—TO SLEEP——
 No *more*——and by a *sleep* to say we end
 The heartach and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to——'Tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be *wished*——TO DIE——to SLEEP——
 TO SLEEP!——Perchance to DREAM!—Ay, *there's the rub*——
 For in THAT sleep of DEATH what *dreams* may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil——
 Must give us *pause*——THERE's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long a life.——

Read slowly so far. The next passage should be read rapidly, for is not Hamlet pouring out quick coming fancies, as if to strengthen his own failing resolution?—

For who would bear the *whips* and *scorns* of time——
 The oppressor's *wrong*——the proud man's *contumely*——
 The pangs of *despis'd* love——the law's *delay*——
 The *insolence* of office—and the *spurns*
 That patient *merit* of the *unworthy* takes——
 When he *himself* might his *quietus* make
 With a bare *bodkin*?——Who would *fardels* bear,
 To *grunt* and *sweat* under a weary life——

Now more slowly—in an altered, lower, fuller tone, expressive of deeper feeling, and even of awe :

But that the *dread* of SOMETHING *after* death——
That *undiscovered* country—from whose bourn
No traveller returns——puzzles the *will*——
And makes us rather bear those ills we *have*
Than fly to *others* that we know not of.

Now change your tone again, for there is another strain of thought. He is half ashamed of his own fears and the conjurings of his own imagination, and he thus *chides himself* :—

Thus CONSCIENCE does make COWARDS of us all——
And thus the native hue of *resolution*
Is sicklied o'er with the *pale cast* of *thought*——
And enterprises of great *pith* and *moment*
With *this* regard their currents turn away
And lose the name of ACTION.

There is so much good practice in this exercise, that you should read it again and again until you are perfect in it.

LETTER XX.

ILLUSTRATIONS CONTINUED.

FROM the same storehouse of illustration I present you with another, in prose. Observe that, unlike the last, which was a soliloquy, this is addressed to others, and demands therefore quite a different tone, more rapid utterance, more firmness and decision in the entire expression of it. The last was a meditation merely, requiring long pauses between different trains of thought, and tones accommodated to the changing moods of the mind. The following address to the players is purely didactic, or, I should rather say, exhortative. The danger to be avoided here is dogmatism or sermonising. Hamlet is not laying down the law, like a judge, but advising, as a friend. He is not a pedagogue, but a gentleman, and you must assume the most gentlemanly, polite and polished manner of expression that you can command. If not satisfied with your reading of it at first, repeat it many times, until you *feel* that you read with ease and grace. Better still if you can find an intelligent friend to hear you read it, and tell you what you read well and where you are defective. I adopt the same notation as before. Observe, that this passage is not at all *oratorical*. It is not “a speech.” You are not “to spout” it, but to *talk* it with spirit and emphasis :—

Speak the speech—I pray you—as I *pronounced* it to you——
trippingly on the tongue——But if you *mouth* it—as many of our

players do—I had as lief the *town-crier* spoke my lines——Nor do not *saw* the air too much with your hand——THUS——but use all *gently*——for in the very *torrent—tempest—and—as I may say—WHIRLWIND* of your passion——you must acquire and beget a *temperance* that may give it *smoothness*——Oh! it OFFENDS me to the soul to hear a *robustious—periwig-pated* FELLOW tear a passion to *tatters—to very RAGS—to split the ears* of the GROUNDINGS——who—for the most part—are capable of *nothing* but inexplicable dumb shows and *noise*——I would have such a fellow WHIPPED for *o'erdoing* Termagant——it *out—Herods* HEROD——Pray YOU *avoid* it——Be not too *tame*——neither——but let *your own* DISCRETION be *your* TUTOR——suit the ACTION to the WORD——the WORD to the ACTION——with *this* SPECIAL observance——that you *o'erstep* not the *modesty* of NATURE——for anything so *overdone* is from the purpose of PLAYING——whose *end*——both at the *first*——and NOW——*was*——and IS——to hold—as 'twere—the *mirror* up to NATURE——to show VIRTUE—her own *feature*——SCORN—her own image——and the very *age and body of the time* his *form and pressure*——Now THIS *overdone*——or come *tardy* off——though it make the *unskilful laugh*——cannot but make the JUDICIOUS—*grieve*——the *censure* of which ONE must——in *your allowance*——o'erweigh a *whole* THEATRE of *others*——Oh! there be *players*——that I have SEEN *play*——and heard *others* PRAISE——and that HIGHLY——not to speak it *profanely*——that neither having the ACCENT of *Christians*——nor the GAIT of *Christian*——PAGAN——nor MAN——have so STRUTTED and BELLOWED——that I have thought some of Nature's JOURNEYMEN had *made men*——and *not* made them WELL——they *imitated* humanity so ABOMINABLY——And let *those* that play your *clowns* speak *no more* than is *set down* for them——for there be of them that will *themselves* LAUGH——to set on some quantity of *barren spectators* to laugh *too*——though—in the mean time——some *necessary question* of the play be *then* to be *considered*——that's VILLAINOUS——and shows a *most pitiful* ambition in the FOOL that uses it.

The next is also familiar to you, although, it may be, you never attempted to depart from the fashion of reading it acquired in your schoolboy days. Macbeth, contemplating an atrocious murder, is haunted by a whisper of

conscience and by some "compunctious visitings of nature." His state is that of dreamy horror—his speech accords with it. There must be long pauses and deep tones, with an expression almost of pain in them. Observe also, that it is a soliloquy, and therefore to be uttered in a manner more *distract* than was required in the last illustration.

*Is this a dagger which I see before me—
The handle toward my HAND?—Come—let me clutch thee!—
I have thee not—and yet I see thee still—
Art thou not—fatal vision—sensible
To feeling as to sight?—or art thou but
A dagger of the MIND—a false creation
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?—
I see thee yet—in form as palpable
As this which now I draw—
Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going
And such an instrument I was to use—
Mine eyes are made the FOOLS o' the other senses—
Or else worth all the rest—I see thee STILL*

Here, with increasing terror in his tone, and with the growing rapidity of utterance that always accompanies terror.

*And on thy blade—and dudgeon—gouts of BLOOD
Which was not so before—*

Here, a long pause, and an entire change of tone. To this point Macbeth has believed in the vision, and is profoundly awed by it; and the tones should express the horror and dread of the situation. But now he recovers his self-command; his reason triumphs over his fancy; he speaks in a lighter tone, and resuming his natural manner, he proceeds:

*—There's no such thing—
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes—*

Then another change ; his fancy flies to the tragedy he is about to enact ; the mention of the bloody business sends him out of himself ; he plays, as it were, with the thought, and conjures up all the images suggested by the occasion, for still he lingers and cannot quite make up his mind. "I dare not," even at this moment, is waiting upon "I would," and in the pause that attends his endeavour to "screw his courage to the sticking point," he says again, in a reflective, dreamy tone :

Now o'er the one-half world
Nature seems dead——and *wicked dreams* abuse
 The curtain'd *sleeper* !——*witchcraft* celebrates
 Pale Hecate's offerings——and *wither'd* MURDER
 Alarum'd by his sentinel—the *wolf*——
 Whose *howl's* his *watch*——THUS——with his *stealthy pace*——
 With Tarquin's *ravishing strides* towards his design
 Moves like a GHOST.

Again a change ; his resolve is somewhat strengthened now : he has made up his mind to do it ; but not without still betraying his infirmity of purpose. In his agony of conflicting emotions, he addresses the earth. The voice must be deep and sepulchral, but slightly tremulous :

Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps——*which way they walk*——for fear
 The very STONES *prate* of my whereabouts
 And take the present *horror* from the time
 Which now *suits* with it ——

Once more a change ; it is settled ; each corporal agent is at length bent up to the terrible feat.

Whiles I *threat*——*he lives*——
 Words to the HEAT of *deeds* too cold breath gives——
 I *go*——and it is DONE——the bell *invites* me——
 Hear it NOT——*Duncan*——for it is a *knell*
 That *summons* thee to *heaven*——or to HELL.

Remember that the purpose of these illustrations is to show you the right use of *emphasis*, *pause*, and *tone*, and these can only be exhibited by a variety of passages on various subjects and in various styles. I ask you now to read another well-known composition, "The Burial of Sir John Moore." The notation is continued.

The reading of poetry, as such, will be the subject of a separate commentary hereafter. The following poem is submitted to you as a lesson in those graces of reading that are common to compositions of all kinds. The subject of this poem demands a serious and somewhat solemn mood of the reader's mind, and as the mind is, so will be the tones of the voice, without an effort of your own. There is much use of *emphasis* and *pause* throughout, but little or no variation of *manner*. Great feeling should be thrown into it, and, when well read, there are few passages in English literature more effective. It never fails to touch, and therefore to please, an audience, however miscellaneous :—

Not a *drum* was heard——*not a funeral note*——
 As his *corse* to the ramparts we *hurried*——
 Not a *soldier* discharged his farewell shot
 O'er the *grave* where our *HERO* we *buried*——
 We buried him *darkly*——at *dead*——of *NIGHT*——
 The *sods* with our *BAYONETS* turning——
 By the struggling *moonbeams'* misty light
 And the *lantern*——dimly burning——
 No *useless* *COFFIN* enclosed *HIS* breast——
 Nor in *sheet*——nor in *shroud*——we wound him——
 But he *LAY*——like a *warrior* taking his *rest*——
 With his *martial cloak* around him.
 Few and *short* were the *prayers* we said——
 And we spoke not a *word* of *sorrow*——
 But we *steadfastly* gazed on the *face* of the *DEAD*——
 And *bitterly* thought of the *morrow*——

We *thought*—as we *hollowed* his narrow *bed*—
And smoothed down his *lonely* pillow—
How the FOE and the STRANGER would tread o'er his head
And *we*—FAR away on the *billow* !
Lightly they'll talk of the *spirit* that's *gone*—
And o'er his *cold* ashes *upbraid* him—
But little *he'll* reckon—if they let him *sleep on*—
In the *grave*—where a BRITON hath laid him.
But *half* of our *heavy* task was done
When the *clock* told the hour for *retiring*—
And we heard the *distant* and *random* gun
That the *foe* was *sullenly* *firing*.
Slowly and *sadly* we laid him down
From the field of his fame *fresh* and *gory* !
We *carved* not a LINE—we *raised* not a STONE—
But we *left* him ALONE—in his GLORY.

The last two lines must be read with increased emphasis—very slowly—the voice slightly elevated, and in a tone changing from sadness to triumph. Repeat them many times, until you are enabled to give to this fine verse its full expression. I can but faintly convey it to you by types and dashes.

LETTER XXI.

ILLUSTRATIONS CONTINUED.

I ASK you now to study one of the most difficult readings in our language ; therefore, excellent practice. It was indeed never read to perfect satisfaction save by one actor and reader—CHARLES KEMBLE. To estimate its difficulties, you should first read it right on, as if it were an ordinary narrative, not regarding *effect*. Then read it with care, designing to give to every word its right expression ; you will be surprised to find how dissatisfied you are with your own performance.

Observe, that it is an exquisite piece of pleasantry, by a professed wit. It is not humorous, nor farcical, but admirably fanciful and witty. Therefore it is not to be blurted out, like a bit of fun, nor cracked, like a joke ; it should be spoken in a light, laughing, musical tone, with the manner of a polished gentleman. A smile should just hover upon the lips, but never breaking into a laugh. Nor is it a soliloquy, but a story told to companions as cheerful and light-hearted as the teller. This *manner* of reading it I cannot illustrate ; I can only suggest it to you—the pauses and the emphasis I exhibit as before.

Oh——then I see——Queen MAB hath been with you——
 She is the *fairies'* MIDWIFE——and she comes .
 In *shape*——no bigger than an *agate stone*
 On the *forefinger* of an *alderman*——
 Drawn with a team of *LITTLE atomies*

Athwart men's NOSES—as they lie asleep—
 Her waggon-spokes—made of—long spinners' legs—
 The COVER—of the wings of grasshoppers—
 The TRACES—of the SMALLEST spider's web—
 The COLLARS—of the moonshine's watery beams—
 Her WHIP—of cricket's bone—the LASH—of film—
 Her WAGGONER—a small gray-coated GNAT—
 Not half so big as a round little worm
 Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid—
 Her CHARIOT is—an empty hazel nut
 Made by the joiner squirrel—or old grub—
 Time out of mind the fairies' coach-makers—
 And in this state she GALLOPS—night by night—
 Through lovers' BRAINS—and then—they dream of LOVE—
 On courtiers' KNEES—that dream on court'sies straight—
 O'er lawyers' FINGERS—who straight dream on FEES—
 O'er ladies' LIPS—who straight on KISSES dream—
 Which oft the angry Mab with BLISTERS plagues
 Because their BREATHS with sweetmeats TAINTED are—
 Sometimes she gallops o'er—a COURTIER'S nose—
 And then dreams he—of SMELLING OUT—a suit—
 And sometimes comes she with a tithe-pig's TAIL
 Tickling a PARSON'S nose as a' lies asleep—
 Then dreams he—of another benefice—
 Sometimes she driveth o'er a SOLDIER'S NECK—
 And then dreams HE of cutting foreign throats—
 Of breaches—ambuscadoes—Spanish blades—
 Of healths—five fathoms deep—and then anon
 Drums in his ear—at which he starts—and WAKES—
 And—being thus frightened—SWEARS a prayer or two
 And sleeps again—This is that very MAB
 That plats the manes of horses in the night—
 And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs
 Which—once untangled—much misfortune BODES—

This exquisite passage of wit is to be pronounced “trippingly on the tongue,” and not to be *mouthed*. It should be spoken as lightly as such a light-hearted fellow as Mercutio would utter a piece of pleasantry. He is addressing

three or four of his gay companions, and he turns from one to the other, as he points the illustration to each of them individually ; therefore, it is not spoken right on, like a speech, but with frequent and long pauses, and with such slight hesitations as serve to show that it is an invention of the moment and not a composition committed to the memory. The difficulty of the passage is very great, and grows with acquaintance. After twenty readings you will be less satisfied with your rendering of it than at the first. But, persevere. It is because of its difficulty that I have selected it for an exercise. When you are able to read this well, you will have made great progress in the art. Do not leave it until you have mastered it. I do not desire that you should read this, or any other of these illustrations, twenty times in one day ; you would not improve by such rapid repetitions ; but read them three or four times at a sitting, and repeat them day by day for weeks, until you, or your friendly counsellor, shall be completely satisfied with the performance.

I will now take you to another passage—short, but demanding extraordinary expression to give full effect to it. This, also, was deemed by Mr. Thelwall to be a test-passage, and he read it with wonderful power. Rightly to measure it, begin by reading it without any emphasis, simply uttering the words with the proper pauses. Then read it *with* emphasis, observing, as nearly as you can, the noting here given :

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David—and he came unto him and said unto him—There were *two* men in *one* city—the *one* RICH—and the *other*—POOR—The *rich* man had EXCEEDING MANY *flocks* and *herds*—but the *poor* man had NOTHING—save *one*—*little*—*ewe lamb*—which he had *bought* and *nourished up*—and it *grew*

up together with him and with HIS CHILDREN——it did eat of HIS OWN meat——and drank of HIS OWN cup——and lay in his BOSOM——and was unto him as a DAUGHTER——And there came a traveller unto the rich man——and he spared to take of his OWN flock and of his OWN herd—to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him——but took—the POOR MAN'S LAMB and dressed IT for the man that was come to him.

And DAVID'S *anger* was GREATLY kindled against the MAN——and he said to Nathan——“As THE LORD liveth—the man that hath done THIS thing shall surely DIE——and he shall restore the lamb FOURFOLD——because he *did* this thing and because he had *no PITY*”——

And Nathan said to David——“THOU——art the MAN !”

Few passages could be found in which so much emphasis is required in the same number of words ; indeed, it is difficult to distinguish the degrees, where most of them require *some* expression. Although typography limits me to three degrees of emphasis in the notation, the actual varieties required for a perfectly correct reading are much more numerous ; but I must leave them to your own good taste and true ear. If you feel fully the meaning, you will probably give it the right degree of force in the utterance. But not varied emphasis alone is demanded—you must observe the varieties of *tone*, which the notation does not attempt to indicate. The prophet begins with a narrative, in the nature of a complaint. It is not a mere story told to amuse or inform ; but he has a mission—he is about to judge the guilty King out of his own mouth, and the grandeur of his mission would influence the tone of the voice and the manner of the utterance. Slowly, gravely, almost solemnly, should you speak what Nathan spoke. Beginning thus, the contrast becomes more marked as you proceed. Sorrow should just tinge the tone at the opening ; but this should change

to positive tenderness in the description of the lamb ; not abruptly, but melting by imperceptible shades. This is excellent study, and you should persevere until the very marked tone of pity is perfectly acquired. You change again to sternness, coloured with indignation, when describing the conduct of the rich man. The tone should be that of anger not quite repressed—speaking louder and somewhat more rapidly towards the close. Then comes David's exclamation—his rage flashing out suddenly, rapidly, and unrestrained, in a voice louder than that of the prophet, in a tone almost of fury, and rising towards the climax, when he pronounces the doom of death, with an emphasis far beyond any yet employed. Then a long pause, while the prophet might be supposed to be looking full into the face of the angry King, watching the flash of indignation in his eyes, and then, the grand catastrophe—slowly, majestically, with a *full*, not a *loud*, utterance—resting and concentrating all the force of your expression upon the word THOU, leave the other words to drop from your lips without an effort, only again slightly increasing the emphasis with the final word.

I might multiply these examples indefinitely ; but space is limited, and I must restrict myself to so many as are necessary to exhibit the most marked varieties of reading. A lesson in pathos will complete the series of illustrations of tone, emphasis and pause. I take the description of the death of little Paul Dombey from Dickens.

Read it slowly, in low soft tones, throwing into them that indescribable expression to which has been given the name of *pathetic*. To express those tones you must feel those emotions ; then they will speak in their own natural language, and kindle sympathetic feelings in every listener.

Observe, also, that it must be read easily, quietly, without an effort, with no seeking after effect ; but precisely as you would have *told* such a story. If at times the voice should quiver, and the eye swell with a tear, so much the better. It will be the more truthful.

Paul closed his eyes with those words and fell asleep——Then he *awoke*——the sun was *high*——and the broad day was *clear* and *warm*——He lay a little—looking at the *windows*——which were *open*——and the curtains rustling in the air and waving to and fro——Then he said——“Floy—is it *to-morrow*?—*is she come*? ”——

Some one seemed to go in quest of her——The *next* thing that happened was a noise of *footsteps* on the *stairs*——and *then*——Paul *woke*——*woke mind* and *body*——and sat *upright* in his bed——He *saw* them now about him——There was no *grey mist* before them——as there *had* been sometimes in the *night*——He *knew* them *EVERYONE* and *called* them by their *names*——“And *who* is *THIS*?—*Is this my old nurse*? ”——asked the *child*——regarding with a *radiant smile* a figure coming in——*Yes—YES—No other stranger* would have shed *those tears* at *sight* of him——called him her *DEAR boy*——her *PRETTY* boy——her *own—poor—BLIGHTED child*——No *other woman* would have stooped down by his *bed*——and taken up his *wasted hand*——and put it to her *lips* and *breast*——as *one* who had some *right* to *fondle* it——No *other woman* would have so forgotten everybody there——but *him* and *Floy*——and been so full of *TENDERNESS* and *PITY*.

“Floy! this is a *kind—good* face——I am glad to see it *again*——*Don't go away—old nurse—Stay here—Good-bye!* ”

“GOOD-BYE—*my child* ”——cried Mrs. Pipchin—hurrying to the bed's head——“*NOT good-bye!* ”

“Ah, yes——good——bye! Where's *papa*? ”

He *FELT* his *father's* breath upon his *cheek* before the *words* had parted from his *lips*——The feeble hand——waved——in the *air*——as if it cried——“good-bye” *again*.

“Now lay me down——and——Floy——come *close* to me——and let me——see you!”

SISTER and BROTHER wound their arms around each other——

and the *golden light* came *streaming* in—and *fell* upon them—*locked together*.——

“How *fast* the river runs—between its green bank and the rushes—Floy!—But it's *very near* the sea—I hear the WAVES!—They *always* said so!”——

Presently he told her that the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to REST——How *green* the banks were NOW——how *bright* the flowers growing on them——how *tall* the rushes!——Now——The boat was out at sea—but gliding smoothly on——And NOW——there was a shore before him—who stood on the BANK?

He put his hands TOGETHER——as he had been used to do, at his PRAYERS——He did not remove his arms to do it—but they saw him fold them so——behind his sister's NECK.

“Mama is like you——Floy——I know her by the face——But——tell them that——the picture——on the stairs——at school——is not DIVINE enough——The light about the head is shining on me as I go!”——

Here a long pause with hushed breath. Then, in a deeper and more solemn tone, and very slowly.

The golden ripple on the wall came back again——and nothing ELSE stirred in the room——The OLD—OLD FASHION——the fashion——that came in with our first garments——and will last unchanged until our race has run its course——and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll——The OLD—OLD—FASHION——DEATH!

Then change the tone and expression to those of glowing exultation, raising the voice and swelling the chest, and closing with the imploring accents of prayer.

Oh! THANK GOD——all who see it——for that OLDER fashion yet of——IMMORTALITY——And look upon us——ANGELS of young children——with regards not quite estranged——when the swift river bears us also to the OCEAN!

Remark, that the words spoken by little Dombey are to be uttered in a low voice, scarcely rising above a whisper, and in broken tones, with frequent pauses—for he is dying.

I next proceed to give some suggestions for the reading of certain classes of composition—as poetry—dialogue—oratory, &c.

LETTER XXII.

HOW TO READ POETRY.

SOME murder poetry by singing it, and some by setting aside the rhythm, the metre, and the rhyme, and reading it as they would read an advertisement in a newspaper. Of these two besetting faults, prefer the former, however nasal the twang. There is at least the consciousness of the presence of poetry—evidence of an ear, if not of a taste, for it. But the prosaic reader revolts you by the unequivocal proof he gives, with every word he utters, that he has neither taste nor ear, and that poetry to him is nothing more than dislocated prose.

The *singing* of poetry is the reader's most frequent fault. Usually it is a habit acquired in very early childhood, the consequence of bad training by the teacher of the nursery rhymes that commonly constitute the child's first exercise of the memory, too often afterwards cultivated by the successive tutors who undertake the task of teaching to read. Metre and rhyme are sore temptations to an uncultivated voice. Probably the natural impulse is to convert them into music. And it must be admitted that music and poetry are very nearly allied. Poetry (I am speaking now of the mechanical part of it) is modified music—perhaps it might be termed imperfect music. Analyse them. Music is an array of inarticulate lengthened sounds, divided into even periods of time. Poetry is an array of articulate sounds or words, divided


into even accentuations instead of even periods of time. These characteristics of song and music run so nearly together, that there is in most of us a decided tendency to pass from one to the other, or to substitute the one for the other, and thus accentuations come to be exchanged for time, and the articulate word lapses into the musical note. This explains the process by which the reading of poetry is so often converted into the singing of it; and indeed the mischief can be prevented only by the exercise of most vigilant care by the first instructors of childhood. The lisping boy chants the nursery rhyme without correction, and thus lays the foundation of a habit which subsequent teachers will but too probably strengthen, and which it will be the arduous work of his maturity to *unlearn*.

Therefore, before you begin to learn to *read* poetry, ascertain if you are infected by the evil habit of *singing it*, for until that is entirely subdued, progress is hopeless. Your own ear will not help you in this investigation, for it has been perverted also, and has ceased to inform the mind of the fact. You cannot so hear yourself as to sit in judgment on yourself—at least until another has listened and pointed out your defects to you, and you learn from his instructions where you err. Call in, then, the aid of a judicious friend; ask him to hearken while you read a few short passages from poetry in various metres, and instruct him that, with most resolute disregard of the danger of wounding your self-love, he must stop you on the way, and tell you of every lapse into *song*, *sing-song*, or *chant*. He must be inflexible in his criticism, or you will not mend. Score with a pencil in the book the lines or words of which he complains. If he is apt at imitation, ask him to show you by his own voice

the manner of your reading. Afterwards, when alone, read the same passages again from the scored page, carefully avoiding the faults he had told you of as attaching to the words marked by the pencil, and repeat them several times. A few lessons, thus learned, submitting the same passages to the judgment of your listener, will enable you to avoid the most offensive features of the evil habit. But be not impatient. As the mischief was early implanted, has been long cherished and grown with your growth, it will not be cured without much care and perseverance; and, however tedious the delay, do not abandon the task until it is thoroughly achieved. It will not be time wholly lost. Having once *unlearned*, the task of *learning* will be comparatively easy.

Thus, having learned how poetry ought *not* to be read, you will proceed to learn how it ought to be read. You must not *sing* it; you must not *chant* it; you must not *drum* it; you must not ignore the metre and the rhyme; you must not make prose of it. What then are you to do with it?

Read it so that metre, rhythm and rhyme may be made sensible to the listener's ear, but without giving prominence to either. The difference between the reading of poetry and prose lies in this, that you mark by your voice the peculiar characteristics of poetry. You must observe the metre, not altogether by intoning it, but by the very gentlest inflection of the voice; you must indicate the rhythm by a more melodious utterance, and the rhyme by a slight—*very slight*—emphasis placed upon it. The rule is plain enough: the difficulty lies in preserving the right *degree* of expression. I cannot convey this to you by words; it can be taught only by examples. Your ear should guide you, and would do so, if it were not per-



verted by bad habits. But, as those habits are probably formed, I can but advise you to do for this as for so many other ingredients of the art,—if you have not a judicious friend, who will hear patiently and tell you of your faults frankly, apply to a professional teacher.

But there are some frequent errors, of which I may usefully warn you.

Avoid set *pauses*. Some readers, otherwise skilful, will make a pause at precisely the same point in the metre of each line, whether the sense does or does not require it. This is not merely monotonous—it is wrong. In the reading of poetry, as of prose, the sound must be subordinate to the sense. Although there is a measuring of words in poetry, there is no measure for the pauses: you must pause wheresoever the sense demands a pause, without regard to the apparent exigencies of metre or rhyme. If that pause so falls that it disturbs the melody of the verse or the harmony of the rhyme, you should preserve them by so managing your voice that, after the pause, it shall resume in the selfsame tone with which it rested, just reminding the hearer of the music of the verse, as an added charm to the beauty of the thought. Then, again, shun carefully the still more frequent practice of pausing at the end of each line, regardless of the requirement of the thought. It is not merely a school-boy's jest that ridicules this sort of reading by the excellent illustration of

My name is Norval on the Grampian Hills——
 My father kept his flock a frugal swain——
 Whose constant care was to increase his store——
 And keep his only son myself at home——
 For I had heard of battles and I longed——
 To follow to the field some warlike lord——
 And Heaven soon granted what my sire denied.

Not a few who think they read well, and who *do* read prose well, completely fail when they attempt to read poetry, because of this propensity to measure every line. And there is another fault frequently associated with it, which has the same origin, and is equally difficult to conquer—that is, reading in a “*wavy*” manner,—I can find no better phrase for it. I mean that regular swell and fall of the voice in accordance with the metre, into which the unpractised appear to lapse unconsciously. Until you have succeeded in banishing this dreary fault, you will not read pleasantly, and the probable effect of your measured tones will be to send your audience to sleep. But as to this also take warning that it is very difficult of cure. The best course of treatment, in addition to that already recommended, is to fill your mind with the meaning of the poet, and to resolve to give full expression to that meaning, forgetting, as far as you can, the metrical arrangement of the words in which the thoughts are conveyed. If your mind dwells too much upon the words, you will *sing* them; but if it is filled with the ideas, you will *read* them.

There is one rule worth noting. The gravest danger in the reading of poetry is monotony. You must strive by all means to avoid this, and resort to every aid to give spirit and variety to your voice. Change its tone with every change in the thought to be expressed. Throw gaiety into it when the theme is cheerful, and pathos when it is sad. Abandon yourself to the spirit of the poet, and let your utterance be the faithful echo of his, even when he rises to rapture. Do not fear to overact; there is little chance of this becoming a fault in the reading of poetry. Mould your style to his. This you cannot do, of course, without thoroughly understanding him, and for that purpose it

will not suffice to trust to the apprehension of the moment, or even to a hasty previous reading; you must study him, line by line and word by word, until you have mastered his full meaning, and then you will be able to give effect to it when you convey it to an audience.

Observe, likewise, that, as a rule, you should raise your voice at a pause, instead of dropping it, as is the frequent habit, and especially if that pause falls at the end of a line. I have already remarked upon the importance of this practice, as giving life and spirit to reading of all kinds; but it is particularly requisite with poetry, because of the natural tendency of metre to monotony.

In *unlearning* your probable bad habits in the reading of poetry, as in learning how to read it rightly, you should adopt a scheme of lessons, so as to accustom yourself to the change by steps. Begin with poetry which has no rhyme, and in which the metre is not very decidedly marked. "*Paradise Lost*" will be an excellent lesson to start with. I do not mean that you should read the whole, but select portions of it. On careful reading you will observe that the pauses are not measured; they do not fall at the end of the lines, but are scattered all over them; and if you strictly keep to these, you must avoid both sing-song and chant. For instance, take the "*Invocation to Light*," noted as before described.

Hail,—holy LIGHT!——offspring of heav'n first born—
 Or of th' *Eternal*, co-eternal beam——
 May I express thee unblam'd——since GOD is LIGHT—
 And *never* but in *unapproached* LIGHT
 Dwelt from *eternity*——dwelt *then* in THEE——
 Bright effluence of bright essence increate!——
 Or hear'st THOU rather——pure——ethereal stream——
 Whose fountain *who* shall tell——Before the sun——

Before the *heav'ns*—THOU wert—and at the voice
 Of GOD—as with a *mantle*—didst invest
 The rising world of *waters*—dark and deep—
 Won from the void and *formless* INFINITE—
Thee I revisit now with bolder wing—
 Escaped the Stygian pool—though long detained
 In that obscure sojourn—while in my flight
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne—
 With other notes than to the *Orphean lyre*
 I sung of *Chaos* and eternal NIGHT—
 Taught by the heavenly *Muse* to venture down
 The dark descent—and up to reascend—
 Though hard and rare—THEE I revisit safe
 And feel thy sovereign—vital—lamp—but thou
 Revisit'st not these EYES—that roll in vain
 To find thy piercing ray—and find no dawn—
 So thick a drop serene hath QUENCH'D their orbs—
 Or dim suffusion veiled—Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander where the *Muses* haunt—
 Clear spring—or shady grove—or sunny hill—
 Smit with the love of sacred song—but chief
Thee—SION—and the flowing brooks beneath
 That wash thy hallowed feet and warbling flow—
 Nightly I visit—nor sometimes forget
 Those other two—equall'd with me in FATE—
 So were I equall'd with them in renown—
 Blind *Thamyris* and blind *Mæonides*—
 And *Tiresias*—and *Phineas*—prophets old—
 Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move
 Harmonious numbers—as the wakeful bird
 Sings darkling and in shadiest covert hid
 Tunes her nocturnal throat.

Here, you will observe, the pauses fall at every part of the verse. This practice will make the first breach in your bad habit of measuring every line. Then betake yourself to some poetry having rhymes, but irregular verse; then to poems whose metres are still more unusual,

until, at length, you may venture upon the metres that most tempt to sing-song, such as that of "The Exile of Erin." And I would especially commend to you, as one of the best exercises for the purpose of *unlearning* this fault the frequent rendering of "Julia's Letter" in Byron's "Don Juan." When you feel yourself relapsing into the old habit, read this passage half-a-dozen times, with careful observance of the singularly varied pauses. It will be a renewed lesson in the art of reading.

I append it. Observe, that it is made up of a series of short sentences, and must be read with very delicate management of the voice, that you may touch with the rhyme the finest chord in the listener's ear; but you must be careful, in attempting this, not to destroy the exquisite structure of the several sentences—which may be described as *sobs of words*, and should be almost uttered as such.

They tell me 'tis DECIDED——you depart——
 'Tis wise——'tis well——but not the less a pain——
 I have no further claim on your young heart——
 MINE is the victim——and would be AGAIN——
 To love too much has been the ONLY art
 I used——I write in haste——and if a stain
 Be on this sheet——'tis not what it appears——
 My eyeballs burn——and throb——but have no TEARS——

 I loved——I LOVE you——for this LOVE have lost
 State——station——HEAVEN——mankind's——MY OWN
 esteem——
 And yet cannot regret what it hath cost——
 So dear is still the memory of that DREAM——
 Yet——if I name my guilt——'tis not to boast——
 None can deem harsher of me than I deem——
 I trace this scrawl——because——I cannot rest——
 I've nothing to reproach——or to request——

MAN'S love is of MAN'S life a thing apart—

'Tis WOMAN'S WHOLE EXISTENCE——Man may range
The court——camp——church——the vessel and the mart——
Sword——gown——gain——glory——offer in exchange
Pride——fame——AMBITION——to fill up HIS heart——
And few there are whom *these* cannot estrange——
Men have all these resources——WE——but ONE——
To love AGAIN——and be again——UNDONE——

You will proceed in *pleasure* and in *pride*

Beloved and loving *many*——ALL is o'er
For ME——on earth——except some years to *hide*
My *shame*——and *sorrow*——DEEP in my HEART'S core——
These I could bear——but cannot cast aside
The *passion* which *still* RAGES as *before*——
And so——FAREWELL——*forgive* me——LOVE me——no——
That word is *idle* now——but let it go.

My breast has been all weakness——IS so——yet——

But still—I think I can collect my mind——
My blood still rushes where my spirit's set——
As roll the waves before the settled wind.——
My heart is *feminine*——nor CAN forget——
To all——except ONE image——madly blind——
So shakes the needle——and so stands the pole——
As vibrates my *fond* heart to my *fixed* soul.

I have no more to say——but *linger*——still——

And dare not set my *seal* upon this sheet——
And yet—I may as well the task fulfil——
My *misery* can scarce be more complete——
I had not lived till now——could *sorrow* KILL——
Death SHUNS the *wretch* who fain the blow would MEET——
And I must e'en survive this last *adieu*——
And *tear* with *life*——to LOVE and PRAY for YOU.

LETTER XXIII.

READING OF NARRATIVE, ARGUMENT AND
SENTIMENT.

Few special instructions are needed for the reading of *narrative*. Your chiefest care will be to avoid monotony. For the most part, there is an even flow of ideas, and a smooth stream of words, tending unconsciously to produce in you an uniformity of expression and tone that is apt to lull the listener to sleep. A continual effort will consequently be required on your part to counteract that tendency, by throwing into your reading as much liveliness of manner and variety of expression as the matter will permit; and it is better to hazard the charge of over-acting, than to find your hearers nodding, starting, and staring, with that extravagant endeavour not to look sleepy by which drowsiness always betrays itself.

Think what a narrative is. You are telling a story from a book instead of from memory—that is all. But when you *tell* a story, you do not drawl it, nor gabble it, nor sing it, nor run right through it without a pause, nor in the same tone, nor without a change of expression. On the contrary, you vary your voice with every variation in the theme: sometimes you speak quickly, sometimes slowly; your voice is now loud, now soft; you express cheerfulness at some parts and seriousness or sadness at others; sometimes your voice swells with the rising inflection,

sometimes it sinks with the falling one; and thus, prompted by nature alone, without teaching and instinctively, your mind not only rightly embodies the ideas, but you give to them the right expression, so stimulating the minds of your audience to attention, and writing upon them that which it was your desire to convey.

But when you take a book and read the same narrative, you will probably assume an artificial voice, tone, and manner—tedious, monotonous and sleep-provoking—and fail to keep attention awake for ten minutes.

How may you avoid this? By going back to *nature*. Think how you would tell that tale out of book, and try so to read it from the book. When reading narrative, let it be ever present to your thoughts that you are but telling a story in choicer language, and utter it accordingly. I do not mean by this, that all narratives should be read in the same manner, for each must be expressed according to its special character: a tone of gaiety should be infused into a light and lively story; a tone of gravity or of sadness into a grave or pathetic tale. But this applies only to the general characteristics of your manner of reading. If any grave passages occur in the lively narrative, or any lively passages in the grave narrative, they must be rendered according to their own characteristics, without reference to the general strain of the composition, which they are designed to relieve by variety. So, when dialogue is introduced, do not fail to seize the opportunity for entire change and relief by giving to it that full dramatic expression which will be described in a subsequent letter. Another means for breaking the monotony of narrative is to raise your voice slightly at the end of each sentence, instead of dropping it, as is the too frequent habit of English speakers and readers.

You will find great differences in the facility for reading offered by different prose narratives. The composition of some authors is so musical—their language has so much rhythm in it—that it is extremely difficult to avoid a lapse into monotony. These smooth sentences are very pleasant to the tongue of the reader, and, at first, very agreeable to the audience; but they soon weary those who have nothing to do but to open their ears. It is necessary that you should conquer this difficulty in the reading of such authors, and therefore you must practise yourself with them assiduously. But not at the beginning of your studies. Commence with the most abrupt and rugged of prose writers, whose aim is power rather than sweetness, and who will not permit you to be monotonous. Advance from them to the writers whose periods are rounded and whose words are musically arranged. Portions of “*Tristram Shandy*” and “*Carlyle’s History of the French Revolution*” afford good practice for a beginning, if you carefully observe all the eccentricities of the composition. Macaulay’s short sentences will assist your next step; De Foe, and Dryden, and Swift will serve for further progress; while the rounded periods, alliterations, and artfully balanced words of such writers as Gibbon and Johnson should be reserved for your latest efforts, when you have altogether, or almost, subdued your impulses to metre and monotony.

But if the reading of narrative is difficult, that of *didactic* writing is still more difficult. The liveliest reading of this class of composition is laborious for the listener to follow, for an *argument* is not so rapidly received by the mind as a *picture*. Mark the difference. When you narrate a story, by your words you simply

suggest a *picture* to the minds of your audience. This does not require the exercise of thought on their parts. They have but to give attention to your words, and instantly, by association, without an effort on their parts, there is called up in their minds the images of the things which those words signify. So it is with *sentimental* writing. The minds of the audience are moved by sympathy, without any exertion of thought. The suggestive words fall on the ear and the emotion follows. But otherwise it is with whatever is in the nature of *argument*. The mind of the listener is not now a mere recipient; it must not only perceive the ideas conveyed, but exercise itself in comparing them, in discovering their differences and resemblances; indeed, it must labour through the whole process of reasoning by which the conclusion is attained. It is necessary to remember this in the reading of didactic writing, so that you may adapt your manner to the mental procedure through which your audience must pass. You must read very much more slowly than is requisite for narrative, because the listener's mind has to go through a process of positive exertion before it can fully receive what you design to convey, and if you read rapidly, it cannot possibly keep pace with you. Therefore, too, you should make long pauses, especially at the close of each proposition or step in the argument; you should emphasise the commencement of each proposition, in order to direct attention to it, and the conclusion should be read with still greater emphasis, and still more slowly, the more firmly to impress it upon the listener's mind and memory—that being the end and object of the previous argument. If the importance of the proposition be great, it is desirable sometimes to repeat it—a device that seldom fails of its

effect, and which is not so often practised by readers, preachers and speakers as it might be.

The foremost difficulty in the reading of all compositions of this class is to *keep* the attention of your audience, especially if the subject is more instructive than interesting. You must rely much upon yourself for this effect. The temptation is sorely upon you to be cold and dull. This is the fault against which you will have to guard and every device must be employed to counteract the tendency. Try to be cheerful, even lively. Seize every opportunity afforded by the text to vary the strain, to change your tone, to alter your expression. The argument must be dry indeed—too dry for any place but the study—that is not varied by illustrations, or relieved by narrative, or by sentiment, or by a flash or two of wit or humour. Avail yourself of all such helps to keep your audience awake, and for the purpose of stimulating attention you may even venture to make them more emphatic than would be altogether permissible elsewhere. Try to render these interludes in the most amusing manner you can assume; discard the didactic tone altogether while the episode is on your lips, and when, in due course, you resume the argument, the effect will be the more impressive—the change will be in itself an attraction, and help you through another passage of laborious reasoning. Even the argument itself is capable of being much enlivened or dulled by your manner of rendering it. Avoid alike the dreary and the dogmatic tone; put it in the lightest and liveliest tones you can assume, but yet with that *earnestness* which gives so much weight to conviction.

Sentimental compositions require the observance of one grand rule—you must *feel* what you read; if you do not, it will fail of its effect. Sentiment sways by sympathy,

and tones are even more sympathetic than words. A sentence that conveys the idea of grief will not touch the heart so speedily or so surely as a sorrowful sound of the voice. Therefore, in reading *sentiment*, give to it the right expression, and vary that expression with every change in the sentiment, and your tone with every degree of emotion. This *may* be acted, if you are a consummate actor, and the voice may assume the fit expression for the words, without even the shadow of an emotion passing over your own mind; but such art is so rare that you are not likely to have learned it. Short of the highest skill, it will certainly betray itself; the listener will discover the absence of the true ring; the sound will have a hollowness in it sensible to the practised ear, and which the unpractised will find in its failing to move them. But *feel* what you read and your hearers also will feel; their feeling will react on you, excite you yet more profoundly, and make your reading still more effective.

But emotion will not bear too long a strain, and you should seize every opportunity for its relaxation. The effect is vastly enhanced by variety, and if the composition is by a skilful writer, that necessary variety will have been introduced. Make the best of it; mark the variety by your manner. Pass rapidly and easily from grave to gay, from the joyous to the sad, giving the full effect to each in its turn, that the effect of the other may be heightened by the contrast.

Sentiment is more frequently found mingled with narrative than occupying an entire composition. In such case it is the more easy, for the story has already prepared the way for a ready rise of the emotion in your own mind, and a more perfect sympathy with it in the minds of your audience. But be more than ever

careful in such case to mark by your manner the boundary between the narrative and the sentiment. Read each, according to its own requirement, in the fashion that has been suggested.

Declamation is properly a part of oratory, and will come to be fully treated of in the remarks on *the art of speaking*; but, as it is sometimes found in books and often in newspapers, I could not complete a commentary on the art of reading without some notice of it. I use it here as a general term, to include all the class of compositions that are of the nature of oratory, whether delivered in the senate, at the bar, from the pulpit, or on the platform. I cannot give you many definite rules for the reading of speeches, and it is extremely difficult to describe by words how they should be read. A judicious teacher would impart it to you in a few minutes, and I can assist you only by negatives. You must *not* read a speech as it was, or ought to have been, spoken, for that would not be reading, but spouting. Neither, on the other hand, must you read it as you would read a narrative. You must assume something of the oratorical manner and tone, and use a great deal of the expression which a good speaker would give to the discourse—the same pauses should be observed, and almost the same emphasis—the “points,” as they are called, of the speech should be well brought out. A little excess of this is preferable to too much tameness, and the lesser error here is over-acting.

The reading aloud of this class of compositions will be found of great utility in educating yourself in the art of speaking, and therefore you should lose no opportunity for practising it.

LETTER XXIV.

SPECIAL READINGS—THE BIBLE.

IN or out of the pulpit, good reading of the Bible is very rarely heard. Even persons who read well any other book, often read this greatest of all books most vilely. Not one clergyman in a hundred can read a chapter *correctly*—meaning by that term, the *right* expression of the sense, as distinguished from the *graces* of expression. Not one in a thousand can read a chapter effectively as well as correctly. It is worse with the laity. So with the Prayer-book. How seldom are the services delivered as they should be; how few can give to family prayer its proper reading! There must be some cause, widely and powerfully operating, to produce so universal an effect, and that cause must be understood before a cure can be recommended. Let us seek for it.

It is the business of the clergy to read, and they have not learned their business if they have not studied the art of reading. It might be presumed that most of them do this more or less; yet such is the difficulty, either of conquering bad habits already acquired, or avoiding a lapse into mannerism where the same thing is often repeated, that we find clergymen remaining or becoming bad readers, in spite of study of the art of reading. Even if they learn to read other things well, they fail for the most part to read rightly that which it is their daily duty to read. Why is this?

I believe the foundation of the fault to be a very prevalent, but a very mistaken, notion that the Bible requires to be read in a different manner from other books, and this independently of and in addition to the expression proper to the subject treated of. A tone is assumed that was originally designed to be reverential, as if the reader supposed that there was something holy in the words themselves, apart from the ideas they express. This *tone*, consciously employed at first, and then kept somewhat under control, soon comes to be used unconsciously and habitually, and rapidly usurps the place of *expression*, showing itself in many varieties of sound, from drawl and sing-song to the nasal twang that formerly distinguished the conventicle. Few readers escape the infection, or shake off the habit when once it is acquired, because it ceases to be audible to themselves. The voice will swell and fall at regular intervals, the reader all the while supposing that he is speaking quite naturally, while he is really on the verge of a chant; yet if, immediately afterwards, he were asked to read a narrative in a newspaper, he would do so in his own proper voice and every-day manner.

This evil habit, so powerful because so imperceptible to the victim of it, is the mischief mainly to be grappled with, for it is the foundation of that bad reading of the Bible which prevails as much in the pulpit as out of it. The first step to conquest is to know the fault and its origin. The supposed *religious* tone must be banished, so far as it is applied to the book itself or to the words printed in it; but there is a *reverential* tone, properly applicable to the meaning conveyed by the words, which should be cultivated. A mere narrative in the Bible demands no utterance differing from a narrative in a

newspaper, unless the subject of it be solemn; but pious exhortations and religious sentiments have a manner of expression properly belonging to them, but very different indeed from the nasal twang and the intoned groans that are so much in vogue. Cast off every relic of these, and then, having first patiently learned how *not* to read the Bible and Prayer-book, study zealously how to read them. The drawl, the drone, the whine, the chant, the groan—these are the besetting sins to be sedulously shunned. Frequent repetition of the self-same passages is apt to generate some of them. The services, recited so often, come so readily to the lips of the clergyman who reads them three or four times a-week, that there is a natural tendency to utterance of them mechanically, without their having first passed through the mind, and hence the mannerisms of which he is unconscious. As once read, so are they always; and if the habit be not early wrestled with, it becomes incurable. The only remedy is the presence of an inexorable critic, who will stop you when you are faulty, and make you repeat the sentence until you read it rightly; or a professional teacher, who will not merely detect your errors, but show you how you ought to read, and thus substitute his style for yours.

A special difficulty in the reading of the Bible arises from its division into verses, and its very incorrect and imperfect punctuation. Indeed, you will find it necessary to overlook the printed signs, and introduce your own pauses according to the requirements of the composition. But they do very much trouble the eye, however resolved you may be not to heed them; and they certainly offer a serious impediment to good Bible reading.

A still more difficult task is to pay no heed to the

verses. You should so read that the listener may be unable to discover from your voice where a verse begins or ends. Often it is the correct measure of a sentence or a paragraph, and then the voice and the verse will run together, only marked as if it were a sentence occurring in an undivided page, and with no indication of any artificial arrangement. The sense does not require this breaking up into verses: it is purely arbitrary. It does not exist in the original; it was adopted in the translation for the convenience of reference, and for chanting; and there is no more call for heed to be given to it in reading than if it were the History of England. Try to forget it; you will find the task extremely difficult, but until you have learned to do so, you cannot read well.

Then apply to it all the rules that have been suggested in these letters for reading other compositions. The Bible embodies all of them—narrative, dialogue, poetry, declamation, argument. It is a magnificent study for the reader, and an admirable exercise, if only he can first banish the bad habits he is almost certain to have acquired from early training and evil example everywhere. At the beginning, rather incline to the opposite fault, and even *gabble* it, as the best means of throwing off the groan or the chant. Read a chapter, as glibly, lightly, and rapidly as if it were a novel. Read it again more slowly; then again more seriously; then with its proper tone and emphasis, only taking care, if you find any of the faults reviving, to banish them by again returning to the opposite manner.

Select for your exercises chapters or passages that contain examples of the several kinds of composition, and confine your attention to each one singly until you

have mastered it. Suppose you begin with a narrative, read it as a narrative, with the same ease, and fluency, and variety of expression, as are recommended in the previous instructions for reading compositions of that class. So with dialogue, or declamation, or argument. Do not assume a different manner or tone from that which you would adopt if you were reading the selfsame sentences in some other book. Give to them precisely the tone, and style, and expression, that you would give to the same ideas conveyed by the same words whensoever or wheresoever you were required to utter them. And give the *full* expression, and nothing but the expression, that belongs to them. Persons accustomed to the *drone*, which they imagine to be reverential, will at first complain that you read the Bible like another book; but they will soon get over this, when they find how much more effectively it is heard and remembered. Another set of hearers, who eschew the beautiful and the pleasing until they banish with them the good and the true, will raise a louder outcry against the right reading of the narrative and the dialogue—that it is *theatrical*; a vague term of reproach, formerly more formidable than it now is, and which you must learn to despise, if you aspire to be a good reader; because, a good actor being a good reader, and something more, you cannot read well until you read as correctly as the good actor reads. You cannot hope to conciliate this class of critics, for they will be satisfied with nothing but a monotonous drawl, and will give the sneering epithet to anything that escapes from their bathos; so you may as well set them at defiance from the beginning, and follow the dictates of your own good taste to its utmost limits, regardless of the protests of the tasteless. If you would

satisfy yourself of the effect of a full and proper reading of the Bible, as compared with the common-place reading of it, read, first, in the ordinary way, and afterwards artistically, the Raising of Lazarus, the Parable of Nathan, the Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion, and the exquisite chapter on Charity, and your audience, equally with yourself, will acknowledge that they had never before rightly comprehended the simple grandeur of those passages.

And so with the reading of *prayers*. Mannerism is more frequent in this than even in the reading of the Bible. The *groaning* style is the favourite one. Why should it be deemed necessary to address the Divinity as if you had a stomach-ache? Yet thus do ninety-nine out of every hundred in the pulpit or in family prayer. There is a tone of profound reverence most proper to be assumed in prayer, and which, indeed, if the prayer be *felt* at the moment of utterance, it is almost impossible *not* to assume; but that is very different indeed from the sepulchral and stomachic sounds usually emitted. It will be observed, too, that readers commonly employ the *downward* inflection of the voice—that is to say, the voice descends at the close of the sentence—whereas, in prayer, the opposite or *upward* inflection should be employed. The voice should *always* rise at the end of a sentence, that being the natural expression of the language of a petition or request. Take the familiar instance of the Lord's Prayer. How many times have you heard it read correctly anywhere or by anybody? I will give it you, as it should be read artistically, according to the rules already suggested. Compare it with your own habitual reading. I mark it as before.

Our FATHER—which art in *heaven*—*hallow'd* be THY name
 —Thy KINGDOM come—Thy WILL be done on *earth* as it is
 in *heaven*—Give us—*day by day*—our daily *bread*—and
 forgive us *our* trespasses—as *we* forgive *them* that trespass against us
 —And lead us not into *temptation*—but *deliver* us from EVIL—
 Amen.

I could say much about the reading of the services of
 the Church, but the subject does not properly belong
 to these letters, which are addressed to you as a law
 student, who must learn to write and read well, in order
 to speak well; therefore, I pause here.

LETTER XXV.

DRAMATIC READING.

I HAVE reserved this for the last, because it includes all the rest. By the term "Dramatic Reading" I do not intend merely the reading of drama, but reading dramatically whatever is dramatic, whether it be or be not a drama in name or form. There is scarcely any kind of composition that does not contain something dramatic, for there are few writings so dull as to be unenlivened by an anecdote, an episode or apologue, a simile or an illustration, and these are for the most part more or less dramatic. Wherever there is a dialogue there is drama. No matter what the subject of the discourse—whether it be grave or gay, or its object be to teach or only to amuse,—if it assume to speak through any agency, other than the writer in his own proper person, there is *drama*. As, in music, we have heard Mendelssohn's exquisite Songs without Words, wherein the airs by their expressiveness suggest the thoughts and feelings the poet would have embodied in choicest language and desired to marry to such music, so, in literature, there is to be found drama without the ostensible shape of drama; as in a narrative whose incidents are so graphically described that we see in the mind's eye the actions of all the characters, and from those actions learn the *words* they must have spoken when so acting and feeling.

Moreover, drama belongs exclusively to humanity. It

attaches to the "*quicquid agunt homines.*" It is difficult to conceive, and almost impossible to describe, any doings of men that are not dramatic. All the external world might be accurately painted in words, without a particle of drama, though with plenty of poetry; but, certainly, two human beings cannot be brought into communication without a drama being enacted. Their intercourse could only be described dramatically, and that which is so described requires to be read dramatically. Of this art, the foundation is an accurate conception of the various characters, and the perfection of the art is to express their characteristics truly, each one as such a person would have spoken, had he really existed at such a time and in such circumstances. The dramatist and the novelist conceive certain ideal personages; they place them in certain imaginary conditions; then they are enabled, by a mental process which is not an act of reasoning but a special faculty, to throw their own minds into the state that would be the condition of such persons so situated, and forthwith there arises within them the train of feelings and thoughts natural to that situation. It is difficult to describe this mental process clearly in unscientific language, but it will be at once admitted that something very like it must take place before Genius, sitting in a lonely room, could give probable speech and emotion to creatures of the imagination. That is the dramatic art of the author, and, because it is so difficult and rare, it is the most highly esteemed of all the accomplishments of authorship.

For the *right reading* of dialogue very nearly the same process is required. You must, in the first place, comprehend distinctly the characters supposed to be speaking in the drama. You must have in your mind's eye a

vivid picture of them, as suggested by the author's sketch in outline. Next, you must thoroughly understand the meaning of the words the author has put into their mouths, that is to say, what thoughts those words were designed to express. This fancy portrait will suggest the manner of speaking; and then, clearly comprehending the meaning of the words, you will naturally utter them with the right tones and emphasis.

As the great *author*, having conceived a character and invented situations for it, by force of his genius, and without an effort of reason, makes him act and talk precisely as such a person would have acted and talked in real life; so the great *actor*, mastering the author's design, rightly and clearly comprehending the character he assumes, and learning the words that character is supposed to speak, is enabled to give to those words the correct expression, not as the result of a process of reasoning, but instinctively, by throwing his mind into the position of the character he is personating. So does the good *reader* become for the time the personages of whom he is reading and utters their thoughts as themselves would have uttered them. *A reader must be an actor without the action.*

Until you have attained to the ready use of this faculty of *personation*, you cannot be a *good* reader of dialogue; but it is a faculty capable of cultivation, and certain to improve by practice. Bashfulness is a very frequent cause of failures that are supposed to result from apparent lack of the faculty itself. Almost every reader shrinks at first from *reading in character*. He fears failure; he wants the courage to break down and try again; he is scared by his own voice, and has no confidence in his own capacities.

But I desire to impress upon you that dialogue must be read *dramatically*, or it had better not be read at all; and, that there may be no tendency to read it otherwise, make it a rule from the beginning of your practice of the art to read dramatically, whatever the book in your hand, and however unsatisfactory the manner in which you may do so at first. Persevere, and you will be able to measure your improvement almost from day to day—certainly from week to week; as you advance, your courage will grow too, and you will not only speedily learn how dialogue ought to be read, but you will acquire the confidence necessary to read it rightly.

Dialogue is the very best practice for students of the Art of Reading. Nothing so rapidly and effectually destroys personal mannerisms. In other readings, it is yourself that speaks, and you speak according to your habits, which are more likely to be bad than good. But in dialogue you speak, not as yourself, but as some other person, and often as half-a-dozen different persons, so that you are unconsciously stripped of your own mannerisms. You must infuse into your style so much life and spirit, you must pass so rapidly from one mode of utterance to another, that the most inveterate habits are rudely shaken. Dialogue is not only excellent practice for yourself, but, well read, it is the most pleasant of all forms of composition to listen to. It never wearies the ear by monotony, for the tones of the voice change with every sentence; nor the mind by overtaxing thought, for each speaker suggests a new train of ideas.

Being such, how should dialogue be read, and how may you best learn to read it?

Dialogue must everywhere and at all times be read in *character*. Whensoever what you read assumes the form

of a conversation between two or more persons, all that is represented as spoken should be read precisely as such descriptions, sentiments, or arguments would have been uttered by such persons as the supposed speakers. I repeat, that you must read these in character, changing the character with each part in the dialogue and preserving throughout the same manner of reading each of the parts, so that it shall not be necessary for you to name the speaker, but the audience shall know, from your utterance of the first half-dozen words, which of the characters is supposed to be speaking. And the change must be instantaneous. There must be no pause to think who the next speaker is, and what he is, and how you should represent him, or how you have already represented him—but you must pass from one to the other without hesitation and apparently without an effort. There is no emotion of the mind which you may not thus be required to express without any preparation, and the changes to opposite emotions are often most abrupt. In short, as I have before observed, a good reader will read as a good actor speaks, only in more subdued fashion, as speech is naturally, when not accompanied by action. This is what you should do ; but how may you acquire the art of doing it?

! Its difficulty cannot be denied. It demands some physical qualifications, wanting which, success is impossible. You must possess a certain degree of flexibility of voice, or you will be unable to modify it for the different personages in the dialogue. All who have emotions can express them, but something more than that is necessary for the reading of dialogue. It would not do to express the emotions of a clown in the tones of a gentleman, and *vice versâ*. But apart from the true expression of the

emotion, there is a *manner* of expression that is quite as requisite to be observed. If, for instance, you read the Trial Scene in "Pickwick," the speech of Serjeant Buzfuz should not only rightly express the ideas put into an advocate's mouth, but also the characteristic manner of his utterance of them. So with the examination of Sam Weller and the other witnesses. Some persons are physically incompetent to this; they cannot mould their voices, nor put off their own characters, nor assume other characters than their own.

But although there is no hope where the faculty is wholly wanting,—if it exists, however feebly, it is capable of great improvement; not without limit, indeed, but the terminus cannot be assigned. So, unless you are conscious of entire incapacity, address yourself to the task hopefully and resolutely, undeterred by failure, because through failure you will best learn how to succeed. And the first qualification is *courage*. Be not alarmed at the sound of your own voice, nor shrink from giving full expression to your conceptions. Resolved to express whatever you may feel, you will begin by reading to yourself the dialogue you have selected for your lesson. Let it be for instance, the glorious scene in "Ivanhoe" between Richard and the Clerk of Copmanhurst. Having thus learned the characters of the two personages, as designed by the novelist, think how such characters would speak—by which I mean the *manner* of their speaking, the tones of their voices, the peculiarities of their utterances, considered apart from the meaning of their words. Read one of the sentences in the dialogue in the manner you have thus conceived of the speaker; repeat the sentence until you are satisfied with your performance of it. Then do the like with the other

characters, until you have mastered them also. In this exercise be careful to study the reading of each character *separately*, and do not attempt a second, until you have so perfectly learned the first that you can read any sentence set down to him in the dialogue in the characteristic manner belonging to him. Do not attempt to read the whole as dialogue until you have thus mastered all the parts in it, and you will find the labour well bestowed, for, this task accomplished, the rest is comparatively easy. The next process is to read the dialogue silently, slowly, and thoughtfully, for the purpose of clearly comprehending what it is that the author designed the characters to say—that is, the *meaning* of the speakers, as distinguished from their *manner* of speaking; for unless you rightly understand this, it is impossible for you to give correct expression to the words. Moreover, this is a fine exercise of the intellect, and it is not the least of the many uses of the Art of Reading, that it compels you to cultivate the full understanding of what you read. Where you have doubts as to the meaning, you will often find them solved by reading the doubtful passage aloud, and your ear catching the words of the author as they presented themselves to him, you will be conducted to the conception of his ideas.

You will now be prepared to begin the reading of the whole dialogue with some success. You have acquired the mannerisms of the various speakers; you have mastered the meaning of the words put into their mouths; nothing now remains but the art of instantaneously changing your manner and voice, as you pass from speaker to speaker, according to the exigencies of the dialogue. This is an accomplishment of undoubted difficulty, but it is essential to good reading; it can be

acquired by practice alone, and, fortunately, perseverance will command success, however impracticable it may seem to you at the beginning.

Thus the art of Dramatic Reading is comprised in three distinct requirements: first, representation of the *manner* of the speakers; secondly, the right expression of the *thoughts* to which they give utterance; and, thirdly, an instant *change* from one character to another, without hesitation or halt for reflection, always so painful to listeners.

And the test of your success in this will be, whether, without its being named by you on the change of speakers, or indicated otherwise than by the change in your manner, your audience know to whose part in the dialogue the sentence you are then reading belongs. In printed plays, the name of the character is set at the commencement of each part of the dialogue spoken by him. On the stage, the eyes inform the audience who he is who speaks, however badly he may play the part. In listening to reading, no such help comes to the eye as from the page or from the stage; and if the reader were to introduce every sentence with the speaker's name, it would be most displeasing. If you read the dialogue rightly, the audience will know from your manner of reading who is speaking, as certainly as if you had prefaced the speech with the speaker's name.

Until you can do this, you will not have learned the art of reading dialogue; in which, as I asserted at the beginning of this letter, is comprised the whole Art of Reading.

LETTER XXVI.

THE READING OF WIT AND HUMOUR.

THE reading of humorous and witty compositions is so pleasing and popular when well performed that it deserves special attention. Alike in your family circle, or at public readings, you will find a delighted audience when you introduce any of the witty or humorous writings in which English literature is so fertile; and they have this recommendation, that they please equally all classes and all conditions of mind. They are relished by the most highly educated and the most uninstructed with equal zest; the same peal of wholesome laughter from the lips of high and low attests the touching of a common chord within.

So much of the flavour of wit and humour, or, rather, the catching of it by an audience, depends upon the manner in which it is conveyed to them, that the cultivation of the art of pleasantly expressing it is well worth your care. The first great rule is to give full play to the fun. But as wit and humour require to be read in very different fashions, it will be necessary that I should briefly remind you of the distinction between them; for they are so often used as almost synonymous terms, and, indeed, are so generally taken by the unthinking to be almost identical in fact, that, unless you clearly comprehend the difference, and discover at a glance whether a composition is witty or

humorous, you will be subject to errors that will wholly mar the effect of your reading.

I repeat that wit and humour are not identical. A man may be very witty without a spice of humour, and humorous without a grain of wit. It may be questioned if ever they are combined in any large degree. A remarkable instance of the difference between them is found in ourselves and our French neighbours. We are rich in humour, but poor in wit; the French excel in wit, but scarcely know what humour is. They can neither produce it themselves nor understand it in others. Compare their *Charivari* with our *Punch*, and the distinction will be instantly apparent. The foundation of the feeling of humour is the sense of incongruity. We have a natural love of symmetry, and any disturbance of it gives to most minds more or less of pain, as where a picture is hung awry, a curve is not perfect, or windows do not match. True, these incongruities do not make us laugh. The probable purpose of Providence in giving us this sense was to conduce to the preservation of order and proportion, that we might not be out of harmony with the world about us, which is all constructed on definite proportions and with designed symmetry.

The end accomplished in the physical world by this sense of symmetry is effected in the mental and moral world by the sense of "the ludicrous"—which is a sort of moral police for the detection of mental incongruity. Its expression is laughter, and ridicule is the weapon by which mental and moral incongruity is repressed; and what is more powerful for this purpose than ridicule?

To put it in a short proposition that may be committed to memory—

Humour is a clear sense of the ridiculous; and the ridiculous is incongruity discovered in things that appertain to humanity, or in things which, by association of ideas, we connect with humanity. Humour differs from wit in this: that the sense of humour is provoked by unexpected incongruity suddenly discovered in things apparently like; wit is the sudden discovery of unexpected resemblances in things apparently unlike; but both requiring, for their proper development, to be expressed in appropriate language.

Wit does not provoke laughter; a smile is the only outward expression of the pleasure which the mind feels in its contemplation. To appreciate wit, a certain amount of mental cultivation and refinement is required. Some minds are incapable of even catching the point of a witticism; other minds find no pleasure in it. But humour is enjoyed by all persons, though in varying degrees. Laughter is its natural expression; and it is a question whether laughter is ever caused by the contemplation of anything which has not a touch of the humorous in or about it.

The reading of witty compositions is more difficult than the reading of humorous writing, because so much of its effect depends upon the reader. A listener would rarely catch a flash of the finest wit unless his attention be directed to it by the reader. Hence it is necessary, in reading wit, not merely to emphasise the witty points, but to change the tone and manner as you utter them, speaking in a short, sharp, incisive tone—the voice raised slightly above its previous pitch. Imagine yourself to be speaking the witticism as the sudden play and inspiration of your own fancy, and not as something taken from a book; you will then probably give to it the natural

expression. Your general manner in reading wit should be in accordance with your theme; lightly, lively, trippingly on the tongue. It is difficult to describe this manner of utterance; but you will, perhaps, better understand my meaning if you recall the brilliant notes that were wont to gush from the lips of Grisi—sparkling and flashing like the stars flung from a superb firework. After such a fashion should your speech be when you desire to read *Wit* effectively.

But *Humour* must be read after another fashion. You should preserve the utmost gravity of countenance—the effect being greatly heightened by the contrast between the ludicrous idea and the grave voice that utters it. You should not appear conscious of the fun, much less share the laughter it provokes. When all around you are convulsed with it, let not a muscle of your face be moved, save, perhaps, for an expression of wonder.

LETTER XXVII.

THE USES OF READING.

At great cost and with much labour you cultivate the art of singing. You employ masters. You practise continually. You pride yourself upon the accomplishment, when it is attained. But, after all, it is merely an accomplishment, pleasant to yourself and to others, although, if its temptations be weighed against its advantages, it may be doubtful which would kick the beam. But the art of reading is more useful, is equally pleasant, and its advantages have no drawback. All that can be advanced in favour of learning to sing can be urged in favour of learning to read, with the addition of many reasons for reading not to be found for singing, and the absence of objections that certainly prevail against the more popular accomplishment.

The uses of Reading are manifold.

You must well understand what you read before you can express it rightly. Not only do you thus learn the thoughts as well as the words of an author, but, giving utterance to them, you assure yourself that it is not a mere speaking by rote, that the ideas have entered into your mind and become a part of its stores. When reading to yourself you are apt to skim the words, without interpreting them clearly to the mind, and to skip passages that may be necessary to a right understanding of the theme. Often the eye runs over the type while

the mind is passive. When you read aloud, even if you address only the chairs and tables, you cannot thus impose upon yourself. The mind must be actively engaged in the work; not only must it *apprehend*, but it must *comprehend*. Before the words on the printed page can come with correct expression from your lips, they must be received into your mind, they must call up there the ideas they were designed to convey, or set in motion the processes by which the desired conclusion is wrought. This compulsion to understand what you read is the first and greatest of the uses of the Art of Reading.

But it is as pleasant to others as profitable to yourself. Reading aloud is not as popular as singing only because the taste for it has not been cultivated, and this lack of cultivation is the result of a lack of good readers, or more properly, perhaps, of the prevalence of bad reading. Seeing that nineteen persons out of twenty read so vilely that it is a positive pain to hear them, it is not surprising that the suggestion of listening to a reader whose fitness is not guaranteed should be received with alarm by those who have never heard good reading. But when you have overcome this prejudice by proof of the pleasure and profit to be derived from a good book well read, you will not want a willing audience. In your family circle this art will be a perennial source of amusement. A boundless treasury is at your command for the enjoyment of your household. Nor is it a selfish solitary pleasure. The same exertion serves for the enjoyment of as many as can hear your voice, and the pleasure is enhanced in each when partaken by many. Nor does the practice of this art demand cessation from other pursuits. While listening to the wisdom, the wit, the poetry, or the emotions, of the greatest and purest

intellects God has created, the hands may be busily employed in useful work ; indeed, most persons never listen so attentively as when their fingers are busy.

But you must not be disappointed if you fail at first to win the ears of an audience, accustomed to read to themselves, but not practised in listening to reading by another. The mental processes are different ; they are not acquired in a moment ; they need more or less of education. If you have read much to yourself, the association of the printed word with the idea it represents is so easy and speedy, you are not conscious that it is an operation learned slowly and tediously. So it is with the listening to reading. The association of the spoken word with the idea it expresses is not so rapid and easy as to be unconscious. On the contrary, you are aware of a mental effort in the act, and you compare the sensible labour of the process of receiving through the ear from the lips of a reader with the facility of passage to the mind through the eye, and you prefer the latter to the former. This, however, is only for a short season. Each time you listen to good reading you will do so with more pleasure, because you will understand what is read with less labour, until you come to receive the ideas thus conveyed to you by the lip as readily as when carried through the eye ; with the added facility of having the true sense of the author presented to you by one who has already learned it, without the labour of studying and searching it out for yourself.

As the object of the Art of Reading is to be understood, and as to be understood you must understand, if it had no other use, it would be an accomplishment of incalculable value. But there are other advantages,

personal and professional. The practice of reading aloud trains you to the habit of hearing your own voice without alarm. You cease to start "at the sound yourself had made." It gives flexibility to your voice, tenderness to your tones, expression to your tongue. Your conversation will be vastly more agreeable when you talk in a strain where the sound echoes the sense, instead of a monotonous muttering, where half the sense is lost for lack of the right expression of it.

And if you are willing to take part in the great work of education, you may render most effective aid by reading to those who cannot read, or who read so imperfectly that reading is a laborious task. Custom has made the process of associating the printed and the spoken word so easy to *you*, that you can scarcely understand how difficult it is to those who have had only a little practice. For the assistance of these, and for the instruction of others who, though they can read readily, prefer the exercise of the ear to that of the eye, especially when the contents of a book are thus conveyed to them by an intelligent reader, a society, formed under the auspices of Lord Brougham undertook the establishment of public readings, open at the smallest charge, at which the office of reader is gratuitously performed. If such a Society does not exist in your neighbourhood, you can easily establish one, at the same time doing an act of kindness to others, and perfecting yourself in the art by practising there the precepts you have learned elsewhere. (a)

(a) The Public Readings Association was originally suggested and afterwards established by the Author. The Penny Readings now so popular, and established throughout the country, were first promoted by the exertions of the Association.

The *professional* advantages of the Art of Reading are greater even than are the personal benefits. A Lawyer is usually the spokesman at public meetings, because it is his business to talk. Often he is required to read reports and other documents. His fame is won or lost by the manner of his reading. When undertaking a cause in any court, the right or wrong reading of some written evidence may affect the verdict. An emphasis on the wrong word, or a pause in the wrong place, may change the meaning of a whole sentence; witness the well-known passage, "And Balaam said, 'Saddle *me*—an ass:' and they saddled *him*."

And, lastly, the Art of Reading is the foundation of the Art of Speaking. If you would speak well, you should first learn to read well. The same play of emotion, the same command of voice, the same use of intonation, the same manner of expressing thought, that are required when you speak your own thoughts in your own language, are needed when you utter the thoughts of another in his language. It is for this reason that I have prefaced my purposed hints for oratory with some instructions in the arts of writing and reading, because the flow of thoughts, the right marshalling of them, and the putting of them into the most expressive language, are best learned in the Art of Writing; how to utter them so that they may be most readily understood is best acquired by the Art of Reading; and these together form the foundation of the Art of Speaking.

LETTER XXVIII.

PUBLIC READINGS.

PUBLIC readings have achieved such universal popularity and are so extensively useful, that it is a public duty to contribute to the common fund of entertainment, which those who have cultivated taste and sufficient leisure are thus enabled to provide for their neighbours.

By taking part in these readings, not only will you do good service to others, but you will reap pleasure and advantage for yourself. Public reading is the best possible introduction to public speaking; it accustoms you to hear your own voice, to face an audience, to speak out, to articulate, and to use expression. You must study the book to master the author's meaning; you must practise reading to convey that meaning rightly to your audience. By this self-teaching you learn more of the art of reading in one evening than you would acquire by twenty trials with none to hear. There is a mental excitement in kindling the emotions of an audience which acts and re-acts by mutual sympathies. You feel the more what you read because others share the same feeling; because you feel more, the more vividly do you express your feelings and the more you stir the emotions of the listener. As you will certainly be called upon to play your part in the now popular public readings, perhaps some hints, the product of experience, will not be unacceptable.

The first consideration is the choice of subjects for

such readings. Even a good reader cannot read everything equally well. Every reader has his speciality, and you will soon discover what is yours. If you doubt, ask your friends who may have heard your readings. Your tastes are not always a test; many persons read worst the compositions they like best. Many grave men excel in the rendering of wit and humour; many cheerful men give admirable expression to tragedy. Indeed, it may be stated as a general rule, that men read best that which is most opposite to their own dispositions.

But although it is necessary to study your own capacities, it is not the less needful to study the tastes of your audience. Heavy, dull, and difficult writing cannot be made pleasant to them by any graces introduced into the reading of it. Public readings are not adapted for argumentative discourses, nor for anything that demands much reflection. The reason is manifest; reflection is a slow process and cannot be performed while the ear is busy catching the coming sentence. Before the mind can pass through the process of reasoning, the reader or speaker has advanced to the next passage; the mind of the listener follows and leaves the last sentence half comprehended; or it hears the coming one imperfectly, and then all is confusion. Subjects fitted for public readings are such only as appeal to the feelings or to the sentiments, that suggest a picture, or kindle an emotion. Compositions that admit of variations in tone and manner are always to be preferred, and, if interspersed with dialogue, so much the more will they secure the attention of an audience. Dramatic readings are always attractive; still more so is narrative interspersed with dialogue, such as a scene from a novel, judiciously selected as having a completeness and unity in

itself, telling a story intelligibly, without reference to the plot from which it is taken. It is their fitness in this important particular, no less than from the vein of humour and tendency to caricature pervading them, that the works of Charles Dickens are so pre-eminently adapted for public readings, and invariably secure such unbounded popularity. If you read them with a tolerable sense of their humour, and even a moderate capacity to express the varieties of character and the changes of the dialogue, you may secure a certain degree of success with any audience of any class that may be collected anywhere. But to give them, as they should be rendered, with the full flavour of the fun, and that infectious relish of it which no listener can resist, you must read and re-read the passages you propose in your programme, until you thoroughly understand them. Indeed, you should prepare for a public reading, of whatever kind, by frequent rehearsals. One of the most famous of our public readers makes it an invariable practice to rehearse, during the day, his readings for the night, even those most familiar to him and most often practised, and in this rehearsal he studies how to utter every syllable and to express every thought with the greatest effect. What *he* deems it necessary to do for the accomplishment of his art, you may be assured you ought to do for the learning of it.

Before you begin to read, if the room is strange to you, you should make trial of your voice, to be assured that the whole company can hear you distinctly; for, if they fail to do so, not only are the distant deprived of whatever pleasure you can give them, but there is sure to be restlessness among those who cannot hear, which will disturb those of the audience within earshot and annoy you not a little. To ascertain this, station a friend at

the extremity of the room, and another about the middle of it. Tell the audience that, as it is your desire that all should hear, if they find they cannot do so perfectly, you will be obliged by their so intimating to you at once, that you may endeavour to accommodate your voice to the space to be filled. Your friends should be instructed to answer this appeal, accordingly as they find, and, as they inform you, so regulate your speaking. I recommend the stationing of a friend in the middle of the room, as well as at the far end of it, because I have frequently found that the voice is very distinctly heard at the far end—probably by reflection from the walls or roof—while it is entirely inaudible in the middle of the room; and the more you raise the voice, the more the middle space is untouched by it. But to be heard distinctly it is not enough merely to speak louder. Indeed, if the voice be strained beyond its natural pitch, it becomes less audible, while you lose all control over its expression; you are unable to vary its tones, and its power as an instrument for kindling emotion is wholly lost. You will best secure a hearing by speaking in a key slightly raised above the talking key, by slow utterance, by studiously distinct articulation, by raising the voice (the upward inflection) at the end of every sentence, and by employing more of emphasis than would be permissible in a smaller circle. *Clearness* is far more effective than *loudness*.

In reading, much depends upon the management of your book. You must learn to read without poking your nose into it, or your voice will be sent down upon the floor, and not into the room. Your eyes must not be ever on the page; they should turn continually from the page to the audience. This is an art that requires some

practice to learn. You read at a glance, with vastly more speed than you can speak, an entire sentence, or some complete part of a sentence; this the mind seizes and retains sufficiently to enable you to remove the eye from the book and speak the words, from a momentary memory of them, while your eyes are upon your hearers. I cannot too earnestly impress upon you the importance of this process. The efficiency of your reading depends upon the more or less of ease with which you accomplish it, and, therefore, you cannot devote too much pains to its acquisition. The position of the book is another important consideration. If held before you, it will hide your face and stifle your voice. The most convenient arrangement is a book-stand, placed at a slight angle, permitting your face to be seen, but with especial care to avoid the opposite danger of your voice being diverted from its proper direction towards the centre of the room. If you have not attained to sufficient mastery of the art of reading in advance of utterance, you should read from behind a table or desk, having the book upon it, above which your head, at least, should be seen. In this position you have the advantage of facing your audience with no screen between you; the only difficulty to be overcome will be that of avoiding the tendency to look down too much upon the page lying below you, and so causing your voice to be directed to the book instead of being sent into the room.

You will stand, of course. Only thus can you give the full compass to your voice.

Your reading should be slow—much more deliberate than in private. You must strive to articulate with almost pedantic precision; distinct articulation is the primary condition of being distinctly heard. Next to

that is the necessity for such management of the voice as shall prevent monotony. Indeed, the primary quality of effective reading is variety of intonation, according to the exigencies of your subject. So important is this, that it should be ever present to your thoughts while reading. No composition of any kind should be read without the introduction of some changes in tone ; and if these do not readily suggest themselves, you should study where you may best resort to them ; assured of this—that to err by too much variety is better than to weary by monotony.

Public reading must partake much of the character of acting. You must endeavour to do all that the actor does with his voice ; you should strive to be thoroughly dramatic, even though your reading should be called theatrical. Throw yourself heartily into the theme, and give the rein to your emotions ; express what you feel, and try to feel what you read.

For your own relief, as for that of your audience, select a variety of subjects, alternating the grave and the gay, prose and poetry, dialogue and discourse. Each is improved by contrast with the other. A list of the “Readings,” which I have found from experience to be most attractive to the usual mixed audiences, may be useful to you, and all are excellent for private practice in the art of reading.

POETRY.

Pathetic and Narrative.

The Bridge of Sighs	...	...	...	<i>Hood.</i>
The May Queen	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson.</i>
Good News from Ghent	...	...	...	<i>Browning.</i>
The Execution of Montrose	...	...	...	<i>Aytoun.</i>
Thanatopsis...	...	...	...	<i>Bryant.</i>
The Village Blacksmith	...	...	...	<i>Longfellow.</i>
The Burial March of Dundee	...	...	...	<i>Aytoun.</i>

Bothwell	...	...	...	...	<i>Aytoun.</i>
Death of Richard Cœur de Lion	...	...	...	...	<i>Reade.</i>
The Grandmother	...	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson.</i>
Poor Jack	...	...	...	...	<i>Dibdin.</i>
The Armada	...	...	...	...	<i>Macaulay.</i>
Inkermann	...	...	...	...	<i>Lushington.</i>
Charge of the Light Brigade	...	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson.</i>
Evening Prayer in a Girls' School	...	...	...	...	<i>Mrs. Hemans.</i>
Waterloo	...	...	...	...	<i>Byron.</i>
Death of Marmion	...	...	...	...	<i>Scott.</i>
The Old Arm Chair	...	...	...	...	<i>Thackeray.</i>
The Three Sons	...	...	...	...	<i>Moultrie.</i>
The Last of the Flock	...	...	...	...	<i>Wordsworth.</i>
Mariana in the Moated Grange	...	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson.</i>
The Old Woman of Berkeley	...	...	...	...	<i>Southey.</i>
The Dream of Eugene Aram	...	...	...	...	<i>Hood.</i>
Dora	...	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson.</i>
Haunted Houses	...	...	...	...	<i>Longfellow.</i>
The Old Cumberland Beggar	...	...	...	...	<i>Wordsworth.</i>
Morning Hymn in Paradise	...	...	...	...	<i>Milton.</i>
The Death of Haidee	...	...	...	...	<i>Byron.</i>
Genevieve	...	...	...	...	<i>Coleridge.</i>
To the East Wind	...	...	...	...	<i>Kingsley.</i>
The Cry of the Children	...	...	...	...	<i>Mrs. Browning.</i>
The Prisoner of Chillon	...	...	...	...	<i>Byron.</i>
Lays of Ancient Rome	...	...	...	...	<i>Macaulay.</i>
The Deserted Village	...	...	...	...	<i>Goldsmith.</i>
Song of the Shirt	...	...	...	...	<i>Hood.</i>
Battle of the Baltic	...	...	...	...	<i>Campbell.</i>
Exile of Erin	...	...	...	...	"
Lord Ullin's Daughter	...	...	...	...	"
The Parting of the King	...	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson's Idylls.</i>
Morte d'Arthur	...	...	...	...	<i>Tennyson.</i>
The Two Angels	...	...	...	...	<i>Longfellow.</i>
The Old Clock on the Stairs	...	...	...	...	"
The Spectre Host	...	...	...	...	"
The Isles of Greece	...	...	...	...	<i>Byron.</i>
Ode to a Nightingale	...	...	...	...	<i>Keats.</i>
Ode to Immortality	...	...	...	...	<i>Wordsworth.</i>

Humorous Poetry.

Pilgrims and the Pease	...	...	...	<i>Peter Pindar.</i>
The Jackdaw of Rheims	...	...	...	<i>Barham.</i>
My Lord Tomnoddy	...	...	...	"
John Gilpin	...	...	...	<i>Cowper.</i>
The Piper	...	...	...	<i>Browning.</i>
Ben Battle	...	...	...	<i>Hood.</i>
The Frenchman and the Rats	...	...	...	<i>Colman.</i>
The Drapers' Petition	...	...	...	<i>Hood.</i>
The Vulgar Little Boy	...	...	...	<i>Barham.</i>

DRAMATIC AND NARRATIVE READINGS.

Trial Scene in "Pickwick"	...	...	...	"<i>Pickwick.</i> "
The Lady in the Yellow Curl Papers	...	...	...	"
The Death of Paul Dombey	...	...	...	<i>Dickens.</i>
Bob Sawyer's Party	...	...	...	"<i>Pickwick.</i> "
Mrs. Gamp and Betsy Prig	...	...	...	<i>Dickens.</i>
The Election	...	...	...	"<i>Pickwick.</i> "
Pickwick before the Justice	...	...	...	"
The Skating Scene	...	...	...	"
The First of September	...	...	...	"
Mr. Winkle's Ride	...	...	...	"
The Boarding School	...	...	...	"
Sam Weller's Valentine	...	...	...	"
Mrs. Nickleby's Lover	...	...	...	"<i>Nicholas Nickleby.</i> "
Clarence's Dream	...	...	...	<i>Shakespeare.</i>
The Critic (First Act)	...	...	...	<i>Sheridan.</i>
Falstaff at Gadahill	...	...	...	{ "<i>First Part of</i> <i>King Henry IV.</i> "
The Clerk of Copmanhurst and the Knight	...	...	...	"<i>Ivanhoe.</i> "
Quarrel of Brutus and Cassius	...	...	...	"<i>Julius Cæsar.</i> "
The Library Scene in "The School for Scandal"	...	...	...	<i>Sheridan.</i>
The Duel Scene in "The Rivals"	...	...	...	"
The Emperor's New Clothes	...	...	...	<i>Anderssen.</i>
The Boots at the Holly Tree Inn	...	...	...	<i>Dickens.</i>
The Cricket on the Hearth	...	...	...	"
The Lark in the Gold Fields	...	...	...	{ "<i>It is Never Too Late</i> <i>to Mend.</i> "

Benedick and Beatrice	...	...	...	{ "<i>Much Ado about Nothing.</i> "
The Death of Cæsar	...	...	...	"<i>Julius Cæsar.</i> "
The Murder of Banquo	...	...	...	"<i>Macbeth.</i> "
The Story of Le Fevre	...	...	...	<i>Sterne.</i>

Carefully prepare the books from which you read. Choose a bold type, for three reasons: first, to avoid mistakes from confused sight; second, that you may keep your face as far as possible from the page; and, third, that when your eyes are turned from the page to the audience, as suggested above, they may readily revert to the words last seen, and for this purpose you should lay your left hand upon the leaf, the finger marking the line at which you are reading; hence the importance of the book lying on a rest instead of being held in your hand. Prepare the book by perusing slowly, pencil in hand, the compositions you purpose to read, and strike out superfluous words in narrative, passages that are dull, uninteresting, and not essential to the right understanding of the theme. A story told will often admit of extensive curtailment, without loss of effect, and thus narratives and dramatic pieces, much too long for a reading, if given entire, may be introduced with advantage, largely extending your range of choice. In dialogue strike out thus all the interspersed "said he," "she answered:" "exclaimed Mr. Smith looking at his watch," and such like, without which a written dialogue would not be intelligible, but which you should so read, that by your changes of voice and manner, the audience may instantly recognise the character that speaks.

So, likewise, score with a line, or with two lines as the case may be, the words or passages which you purpose to emphasise especially; for in the intense absorption of

the mind in reading, you are liable, unless very familiar with your subject, to begin a sentence in a tone not precisely adapted for the ending of it, and an excess of emphasis at the beginning will seriously mar the effect of it at the close. While you are yet a learner, it would be well to make extensive use of this plan of marking your pages for guidance upon the platform in the manner of reading resolved upon in the study.

The most able of our public readers has adopted the convenient practice of cutting his favourite "readings" out of the volumes in which they are found and pasting them into a volume made of blank leaves. In this manner he is enabled to carry with him under one cover all that he requires for several evenings, avoiding the inconvenience that attends the conveyance of a small library, with the added advantage of an ample choice, should a change in the programme be desired, ready finding of the successive readings, and having them always at hand prepared for use by excision and scoring in the manner recommended.

You will spoil a few volumes in the process, but, by taking opportunities to procure second-hand and injured books, the cost would be but trifling as compared with the convenience, should you assist the Public Readings as often as you ought to do, if capable.

Variety in the entertainment will be secured, and the pleasure of the company much enhanced, by reading dialogue in parts, as it would be acted, each character being read by a different reader. Short farces thus well read are extremely effective. An entire play, even one of Shakespeare's, may be produced thus, provided a sufficient number of tolerable readers can be obtained; but that is a grave difficulty, of course. Where music belongs to the

drama, the effect is further heightened by the introduction of the appropriate music. Thus, "Macbeth," judiciously curtailed, the heavier scenes being omitted, with all of Locke's music interspersed, forms a pleasing and most attractive entertainment. So also does "As You Like It." It is scarcely necessary to say that care must be exercised in the selection of readers on such occasions; and there should be repeated rehearsals before a competent critic, who should freely point out faults and prompt amendment.

Music, indeed, mingles well with readings, relieving the ear and giving rest to the mind. The change imparts new zest to each in its turn. The hints I have here supplied are the result of personal experience, and, therefore, practical.

LETTER XXIX.

THE ART OF SPEAKING.

THE *Art of Speaking* is based upon the Arts of Writing and Reading, which are the proper introductions to it. The orator should have perfect command of thoughts, words and utterance. You must have ideas or emotions which you desire to express ; you must have the right words in which to clothe them ; and you must speak those words in the manner that will convey them the most thoroughly into the minds of those who hear them. To adopt a popular phrase, the Art of Oratory presents itself in two great divisions—*What to speak, and how to speak it.*

But oratory is something more than the Arts of Writing and Reading combined. You may be able to write an excellent essay, and yet unable to compose a tolerable speech ; so you may read well, but speak badly. The Arts are, therefore, not identical, but they are very near of kin. *Cæteris paribus*, a good writer and reader will be a better speaker than he who writes imperfectly and reads badly. Almost all the hints that have been given to you in former letters for learning how to write and how to read are equally applicable to learning how to speak. I do not propose to repeat them, but, assuming that you have read them and given them such consideration as they may appear to you to deserve, I will begin by pointing out to you where they diverge, and what further you must do to accomplish yourself in

the art that is the highest and ultimate object of your ambition.

As before, I must guard myself from the imputation of vanity in attempting to teach you how to speak. I cannot pretend to be able *to do* what I think ought to be done for the acquirement or the practice of oratory. I profess nothing more than to have given some thought to the subject, and solved some of its difficulties, and I hope, therefore, that I may be enabled to convey a few useful precepts, although I could exhibit no satisfactory example.

As I have already stated, the first subject for consideration will be *what to say*, the second *how to say it*; in other words, first, *the matter*, second, *the manner*.

The composition of a speech, whether prepared or extempore, will be considered with some care, and this will be followed by hints for the art of uttering it in the manner most effective for its purpose. This will comprise the cultivation of the voice and gesture, with the minor graces that constitute the finished orator. Hints for the study of these will be submitted to you. The various kinds of oratory, with the requirements of each, will be separately treated of, but with more especial reference to the oratory of the bar and of the platform, as those to which your practice will be most frequently directed.

Such is the outline of the design contemplated for the completion of the subject which I have sought to bring under your consideration in these letters. It involves many incidental topics, which I purpose to treat as they arise, in association with the main thread of the argument. As before, my aim is to offer you some practical hints for self-teaching, gathered from observation or

suggested by reflection. Although I have no pretension to be an orator, I do not write wholly from theory. The requirements of my profession have compelled me to give some attention to the art, and that which I learned with difficulty and labour, because I had no guide, I am desirous of conveying to you in a form which I hope may give you the sum of much tentative toil, and the benefit of combined thought and experience. I do not place it before you as a *system*. I have constructed no elaborate scheme; I have no formulas to prescribe, and scarcely anything to propound in the nature of positive rules. A true orator, like a poet, must be born such; he cannot be *made*. I can pretend to nothing more than to tell you what you should try to do and what you should endeavour to avoid, throwing out suggestions of apt means for cultivating the mental and physical faculties requisite to success.

But although you may be wanting in the capacities needful to a great *orator*, you may certainly train yourself to be a good *speaker*—that is to say, you may learn to express your thoughts aloud, in language that makes them clearly intelligible to your audience, and in a manner that is not painful to them. The foundation of the Art of Speaking is, of course, the possession of ideas to be spoken. A speech cannot be constructed without *thoughts* of some kind to be expressed in words. You must fill your mind with ideas somehow. Wanting these it is useless to attempt the art; but, having them, the utterance of them, both in language and delivery, is to some extent a matter of training. The power of words is, indeed, denied to some men, though they are few; more frequently the voice is defective; in other cases Nature has made gracefulness of manner impossible; but these,

though essential to *oratory*, are not necessary to *speaking*, and you may become a very tolerable *speaker*, though wanting in some, or deficient in all, of the qualities I am about to describe. Therefore, I exhort you not to be dismayed by seeming obstacles at the beginning. Be resolute in self-training ; proceed persistently, in spite of repeated failure ; fear not to break down ; measure your faults, and put them to mending ; be earnest and unwearied in the pursuit of your object, and you will assuredly attain it.

The uses of the art, its advantages to all men, but especially to a Lawyer, need no description. They must be patent to you, for everywhere you see men who have risen to the highest places solely by virtue of this accomplishment. In a free country it must ever be so. The man who can express powerfully what others feel, but are unable to express, wields the united power of all the minds of whom he is the exponent. There is no such personal influence as that enjoyed by the orator, for he not only implants his thoughts in other men, but directs them to action. The man who can stand up and speak aloud to an assembly a single sentence intelligibly has a faculty that sets him in power and efficiency far above his fellows. Such an accomplishment is worth a great deal of patient industry to attain, and if I cannot pretend to teach it, I may, perhaps, be enabled to put you in the way of learning it, even although I am unable to practise my own preaching.

LETTER XXX.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE ART OF SPEAKING.

INSTINCTIVELY you will change the structure of the sentences, and even the words, to express the self-same thought in talking, in writing, or in speaking. But it does not therefore follow that you will instinctively frame your speech of the best words in the best places, and utter them in the most effective manner. These are matters for education, the product of artistic training and much practice. I have shown you before that reading is not a matter of course ; so neither does excellent oratory come from nature. You will often hear it asserted otherwise, and there seems to be a prevalent impression, among those who have never given thought to the subject, that any man who can read words can pronounce them properly, that words will come when they are wanted, and that, if you find the words, you may be an orator without further labour. Few have formed the slightest conception of the number and variety of the qualifications essential to effective speaking—how the memory must be filled with facts and words ; how the intellect must be cultivated to rapid understanding and still more rapid reasoning ; how the feelings must be at once powerful and under perfect control ; how the voice must be trained to give the full expression, and the taste to impart the true tones, infinitely varied, to the entire of the discourse. Then the mind must be exercised to a rapid flow of ideas.

and to the instant composition of sentences wherein to clothe them; add to these, a voice attuned to sweetness as well as power, and the limbs tutored to graceful action, and you have a short summary of the acquirements necessary for an orator.

You will see from this that there is a task before you that will demand all your energies and perseverance, for it will be a work of long labour. You will say, perhaps, that there are books and teachers enough to help you to your object—books that profess to impart the whole art of oratory, and teachers of elocution who promise to make you an accomplished speaker in a certain number of lessons. As I have stated in the preceding letters on the Art of Reading, I have looked with care into many of these books, and listened to some of these teachers, and I must confess that I have found in them very little that was calculated to train a student to oratory. The rules propounded are usually pedantic and often impracticable. Inasmuch as every student requires a different training, according to the specialities of his natural gifts—his peculiar intellect, temperament and *physique*—very few general rules can be prescribed; so few, indeed, that it would be better to abolish the term and substitute merely hints and suggestions for strict formulas. Teachers of elocution too often impart to their pupils a mannerism that is more disagreeable than even positive incapacity. It is less painful to listen to an awkward or stumbling speaker than to a stiff, constrained and artificial orator, who is manifestly talking by rule.

But the foundations of the Art of Oratory may be described in a few words.

The first qualification of an Orator is *to have something to say*.

The second is *to sit down when he has said it.*

These have been already described at some length in my Third Letter ; to that I refer you, asking you at this place to render repetition unnecessary by turning back to those pages, and reperusing them, for they cannot be too firmly imprinted upon your memory.

LETTER XXXI.

THE ART OF SPEAKING—WHAT TO SAY—
COMPOSITION.

It seems like a truism to tell you that before you speak you should have something to say. But it is a necessary caution; nothing is more common than to hear a man speak for a long time and utter nothing but words—words—words—without a grain of thought at the heart of them. The popular ear so readily mistakes fluency for eloquence, and copious language for abundant wisdom, that ignorance and emptiness may be well excused for venturing where real ability fears to tread. Now, as there is nothing easier than “bald disjointed chat,” or speech “full of sound and fury, signifying—nothing,” there is some danger of your falling into it, unless you resolve, from the beginning of your career, never to speak unless you have something to say, then to say what you have to say, and to sit down again when you have said it.

All this appears very easy on paper, but it is very difficult in practice. A true orator must possess the full mind as well as the ready mind. He must know much, and think much; he must open his eyes and ears to receive knowledge of all kinds from all quarters, and his mind must be ever busily at work reflecting upon the knowledge thus acquired. Indeed, there is no sort of intelligence that will not come into use at some time. I

can, therefore, propose to you no scheme of studies wherewith to lay the foundation of oratory, for it is to be pursued everywhere, and comprises everything. The only rule I can give you is, to learn all you can, from all sources and of all kinds. Practise the art of writing, as already suggested to you, diligently, as being the best preparation for oratory. The instructions there given are to be pursued, but with another purpose. The Art of Writing will assist you to the Art of Speaking; but it is not all that you require, and you must rightly understand and carefully keep in view the differences between them, which I will now endeavour to explain to you.

There are three ways of expressing your thoughts, *talking*, *writing* and *speaking*. I use the familiar terms, because they convey my meaning more accurately than finer phrases. If you were required to express the same thought, or tell the same story, first, to a fireside circle, afterwards, in an article for a newspaper, and finally, in a speech to an assembly, you would certainly do so in three very different forms of composition, and in two, if not three, sets of words. If you had made no preparation for either performance, you would fall unconsciously into the natural style appropriate to each situation. Only when you may have educated yourself into a bad habit of confounding the styles, would you *spout* an essay or *talk* a speech.

Talk differs from writing or a speech in this, that it is a broken, and not a continuous, stream of thought. Talking implies the participation of others in the discourse. If you have all the talk to yourself, it is not talking, but *declamation* or preaching; that is to say, it is not an interchange of thoughts, but merely the

utterance dogmatically of your own ideas. The manner is as different as the matter; you assume unconsciously the colloquial tone, which does not assert or affirm, but suggests, submits to consideration, puts an argument interrogatively, as if to say, "Do you not think so?" "Is not that right?" "Are you of the same opinion?" "What say you to it?" thus stimulating conversation by inviting the free expression of differences. You do not say of any proposition that "it *is* so," but that "such is your view of it," "so it *seems* to you," and you ask if your companions "agree with you." Necessarily, your sentences are short, your words are expressive rather than select, and the perfection of talk is brilliant dialogue.

Now set yourself to *write* on the same subject; how different will be the framework! You desire to express the same thoughts. At once your mind falls into another mood. Now, you discourse without let or hindrance; you have it all your own way; you do not look for interruption, nor invite dissent; you make assertions, you pursue a course of argument, you say, "it is," or "it is not;" the stream of thought flows on continuously until it is exhausted. In accordance with these features of your thoughts is the composition of the language in which they are expressed. Your thoughts are distinctly conceived, your words are well weighed, your style is formal; you arrange your words in a different order, and are studious of the strict rules of composition, for that which is to be read permits of transpositions forbidden to that which is to be spoken.

But if you *speak* upon the same subject, although you desire to express the same thoughts, you will naturally do so in a different fashion. If you were to speak as

you had written, you would probably be unintelligible to half your audience and uninteresting to all; your discourse would appear intolerably starched, dogmatical and dry. The reason of this is, that the mind of the *Hearer* must follow the words of the *Speaker* as fast as he utters them, and unless those words convey the thought at once, without sending the mind backwards or forwards in search of it, it falls by the way, or what is worse, it is misunderstood. The *Reader* can pause to reflect, he can reperuse any passage not instantly intelligible; but if the *Listener* does not seize it on the instant of its expression by the speaker, it is lost to him altogether, without hope of recovery.

You will now see, I trust, wherein lies the difference between composition for speaking and for writing. Oratory requires, not only its own language, but its own composition; the framework in which a speaker's thoughts are set differs widely from that employed by the talker or the writer. The style is more formal than that of the former, and less formal than that of the latter. A speech that resembled talking would be an impertinence; a speech like an essay would be a bore. You must learn the mean between them. Writing is, nevertheless, the foundation of speaking, and will be found the best practice to qualify you to be a speaker. You should write much upon the topics on which you expect to be required to speak much, and this for two purposes: first, to cultivate ideas upon them; and, second, to learn how to express those ideas with precision. The habit of putting your thoughts into writing affords the only guarantee that those thoughts have substance in them, and are not merely vague and formless fancies. When first you come to set down upon paper your ideas upon any subject,

however you may imagine yourself to be well acquainted with it, you will be surprised to find how dreamy and shapeless are the thoughts you had supposed to be so distinct and symmetrical. The pen is a provoking fetter upon the flights of fancy; but it is a wholesome cure, and makes you a sensible man instead of a dreamy fool. *Write*, therefore, often and much, preferring the subjects on which you may anticipate that you will be required to speak.

But there is danger to be avoided. You write for the sake of acquiring clear and rapid thoughts and expressive words—nothing more. This is all writing can teach you that will serve you in speaking. What more you may learn from the practice of writing will be injurious and will require strenuous exertions to avoid. I have told you already, that the framework of spoken thought differs widely from that of written thought. In so far as the style of written composition differs from that of speech, you must keep strict watch over yourself to prevent the practice becoming a habit. This is the difficulty and danger, for which I can suggest no way of escape save your own vigilance. It is something to know where danger lies, and you should keep the memory of it ever before you. Perhaps the best counteraction would be to revise what you have written, thinking how you would have said the same thing had you spoken instead of written it, and sometimes even to re-write it as if it had been designed for a speech; the comparison will show you the difference in the manner, and disturb the habit of throwing your thoughts into the peculiar form of written composition, which otherwise might become unmanageable.

LETTER XXXII.

CAUTIONS—HOW TO BEGIN.

THE practice of writing a speech must be pursued with this caution, that you guard yourself against acquiring the mannerism that belongs to it, and which very little experience will teach you to detect in any speaker who has written his speech and recites it from memory. Both thoughts and words, in written discourse, unconsciously, and in spite of your efforts at prevention, marshal themselves in an order different from that which they fall into when spoken. By recommending to you the practice of composition with the pen, I do not therefore design to encourage the writing of speeches. There is indeed no error against which I would more emphatically warn you; but unless you can compose rapidly using the pen, you will not do so using the lips; you may, indeed, talk sound sense, but you will talk it so badly that it will be painful to listen to you.

The object of oratory is to influence your audience by *convincing* or *persuading* them; by satisfying their *judgments* or kindling and attracting their *sympathies*. Your purpose is not, or ought not to be, to astonish them by ingenuity, or to gratify their tastes by your art. You appeal to their reason, or to their feelings, or to both, with intent to induce them to share your convictions or your emotions. Hence the presence of earnestness on your part is necessary to success. The mere appearance

of conviction—an obvious sincerity of belief in the cause you are advocating—will often make more converts than the most unanswerable arguments; and such is the sympathy of human feelings, that the presence of real emotion in you is sure to command the emotions of your hearers; while the absence of it, or the show of it only, however well acted, will as certainly fail to carry an audience along with you. Mind is moved by mind; feelings are stirred by feelings. The orator must never forget the poet's truth,

That we have all of us *one* human heart.

There are vast variances of intellect descending from Shakespeare to an idiot. The intelligence of an audience varies immensely, the best certainly not being the most numerous. Taste, fancy, perception, apprehension, and comprehension are as unlike in different persons as their features, and the full possession of these powers is as rare as beauty. But the emotions are nearly the same in all of us, of what class or training soever. Education cannot create nor neglect destroy them. Your most convincing appeals to the reason will be understood by few; the brightest pictures of your fancy will call up the like pictures only in the select of your listeners; your wit will be appreciated but by the most refined; and your most exquisite language will be understood by those only whose tastes have been cultivated like your own. But your emotions will find an echo in every breast, even the rudest; you will touch all minds simply by the force of sympathy. The just and the right will bring down applause, even from those who rarely do right or practise justice. Generous sentiments will be welcomed with hearty cheers; righteous indignation will make the most

sluggish bosom heave and the dullest eye flash. If you doubt this, go to any public assembly and mark what most wins the ear and stirs the heart. Enter a theatre, and note what the galleries are the first to perceive and the heartiest to applaud. Not the wit, nor the wisdom, nor the loftiest flights of poetry; but the generous sentiment, the noble deed, the true word, the honest indignation.

Think of this when you find your audience cold and unsympathising. Be then assured that the fault is in yourself; that you have not measured them aright; that they are not of intelligence sufficiently large and lofty for the height of your great argument. But bethink you also that they are men, and, if they have not *minds*, they assuredly have *hearts*. Cease to talk to the intellect and appeal to the feelings, and you will certainly succeed—if to succeed be your ambition.

And that is the purpose of speaking. The object of oratory is to move your audience. If you desire to persuade the distant or the future, you appeal to them through the pen and the printing press. If you strive after both effects, you will probably fail in both, for the manner of address is different. You will never carry an audience with you by a spoken essay; you will never captivate a reader by a printed oration. The utmost that can be said of a recited discourse is, "How very clever!" The utmost you can say of an oration you read is, "How that would have moved me if I had heard it!"

Have, then, these maxims ever before you:—

1. That the one purpose of oratory is to *persuade* your audience.
2. That an appeal to the sentiments and feelings of a

mixed audience is always more effective than an appeal to their reason.

3. That to kindle emotions in your hearers you must yourself be moved.

But you must not begin your practice of written composition by writing speeches. Begin with a plain narrative in the plainest words. Eschew fine writing. Do not think it necessary to adopt a new language because you have a pen in your hand and paper before you. The fit words will come when you have clear thoughts and they have learned to flow freely. Take courage—and it does require some courage at first—to call a spade by its proper name, “a spade;” that name will give a more correct idea of the thing you wished to say than any possible periphrasis. By way of beginning, relate some incident you may have witnessed; resolve to describe it precisely as you saw it, and as you would have told it to a friend in the street, with no more effort as to the manner of telling it. You will be surprised to find how difficult this is. Nevertheless, go on; say something. Do it as well as you can. Having done it, read aloud what you have written. You will doubtless be ashamed of the senseless jumble. But spare your blushes; you have failed in common with many of unquestioned capacity. In truth, the thing you have been striving to do is the most difficult achievement in composition—the last to which experience attains. To say what you have to say in few but simple words is the highest accomplishment of art. Be not therefore disheartened; correct the work you have done; or, better still, if you have a practised friend, ask him to go through it with you, point out your faults, and make you correct it in his presence, correction upon correction, until the work assumes a

decent shape. And in the performance of this process write each improved edition below the former one, so that you may compare the last with the first, and any one with any other, and trace the march of improvement and learn the faults to be avoided.

From plain narrative proceed to essay, to argument, to declamation, to poetry—very necessary to accustom you to give the glow of colour to your thoughts and music to your words. It matters not that your prose and your poetry are equally unfit for publication ; that is not your object. Think not of it as such, but solely as a lesson, which you may thrust into the fire as soon as it is finished. Indeed, better that you do so, and then it will never cause you to be put to shame through the vanity of appearing in print. Write as many lines to Celia and Delia as you please ; the more of them the better for your education in oratory ; but have the courage to burn them before the ink is dry. At last, when you are well practised, when you can write with tolerable fluency and correctness, and throw some thoughts into what you write,—not stifled in a cloud of fine words, nor disguised in roundabout phrases, nor the nouns buried beneath the adjectives,—begin to write imaginary speeches in a modest way.

To do this rightly you must surround yourself with an ideal audience, and you may further become, in fancy, any orator of fame ; or, what is better, imagine yourself an orator, winning the ears and moving the hearts of an excited and admiring multitude. Choose for your theme some topic of the day that may have interested you, and upon which you have feelings, and perhaps believe that you have decided opinions, large and liberal. Before you begin to write, close your eyes ;—

not to go to sleep, but the better to bring the picture before the eye of the mind, and then think what you would say to charm such an audience as your fancy has conjured up. You will experience a rush of fine thoughts and eloquent words. Seize your pen instantly, and set them down. Why do you pause before half-a-dozen words are inscribed,—bite your pen,—write another word or two,—pause again,—draw your pen through the writing,—write another word,—erase that—and then close your eyes and address yourself again to thought? Wherefore are not the thoughts that came so quickly *before* you began to write as quickly caught and fixed upon the paper; and where are the words that then flowed so richly? Ah! when you come to put them into shape, you learn how merely fanciful they were; how unsubstantial the ideas, how chaotic the language! It was to teach you this truth that you were recommended to write. It is the surest means of learning the lesson of your incapacity, and it is at the same time its best remedy. The first step is taken, and a most important one it is. You have learned that an ordinary array of thought, clothed in appropriate language, is not attained without diligent study, long labour, and much practice. The path is now cleared of the obstruction of self-confidence; you know your weakness and what and how much you have to acquire, and therefore you are in a condition to begin the work of self-teaching. You will commence with an attempt to write a speech.

LETTER XXXIII.

THE FIRST LESSON—WRITING A SPEECH.

Do not be discouraged by the difficulties: all that is worth having is difficult at first. In despite of pauses, pen-bitings and obliterations, still, I say, persevere. Every successive sentence will be easier to compose than was its predecessor. But remember that you must have *something to say*. Be assured that you have really a distinct and definite conception in your mind of an idea which you desire to convey to other minds. So long as you are merely thinking, you cannot be sure that your thought is clear. Is it an argument? Often you jump at the conclusion without regarding the intermediate steps; your sentiments are still more frequently but indistinct emotions, which you mistake for thoughts; and the imperfections in your narrative do not force themselves upon your attention until you are compelled to put it into shape. Hence, at the beginning, it is necessary that you should test yourself by trial in private, before you risk the chance of learning your defects by a public failure. The best gauge of your power to think is to write down your thoughts; for thus you learn what your thoughts are worth, as well as in what words to express them.

Therefore, before you attempt to speak a speech, write one. Choose your theme, and ask yourself this plain question. "What do I want to say about this subject?"

In speech you may say much that would be inadmissible in writing. Written declamation is disagreeable, but declamation may be employed with great effect in speech. The structure of the sentence differs in the two forms of discourse, and the very language is unlike. A spoken essay would be as intolerable as a written oration. In the essay, we look for thoughts; in the speech, mainly for sentiments and emotions. The former is supposed to be the utterance of profound reflection in skilfully constructed sentences; the latter is the outpouring of the mind in the words that rush to the tongue, regardless of the orderly array prescribed to deliberate composition.

Nevertheless, you should try to write a speech before you attempt to speak one. But write it as you would speak it. To do this you must exercise your imagination, and suppose yourself to be in the presence of an audience, upon your feet, about to address them on some theme familiar to you; acting, as it were, as your own reporter. Doubtless you believe your mind to be full of fine ideas and your brain overflowing with apt words wherein to clothe them. Before you have written three lines, you will be amazed to discover that those crowding thoughts are very shadowy and indefinite, those thick coming fancies little better than dreams, and the glowing words extremely reluctant to fall into orderly array. In fact, you will find that you have yet to learn your lesson, and to do so you must begin with the rudiments of the art.

And great, indeed, will be the value of this first lesson, if only it should teach you thus much—that you have everything to learn. The first step to all knowledge is the knowledge of our ignorance.

You will find your pen halting for thoughts and words;

if you try to dash along careless of what you write, you will be displeased with yourself when you read what you have written. But be of good courage; already by your failure you have taken a long step towards success. Now you have measured your incapacity and the difficulties to be conquered even at the threshold of your study. You will thenceforward make rapid progress, with the help of patience and perseverance.

No matter how slowly the work is done—*do it*. Complete your exercise in some shape, however clumsy. The express purpose of this first lesson is not so much to teach you what to do, as to convince you by experiment what you *cannot* do.

Having made two or three trials in this way, until you are able to express some definite thoughts in definite language, you may advance to the next process and attempt the construction of a formal speech—this also in writing, but written precisely as you would have spoken it—in the style and language of oratory. Begin by sketching an outline of your proposed treatment of the theme. Asking yourself “What have I to say about it?” note in two or three suggestive words the ideas as they occur to you in meditation. Afterwards arrange these in orderly fashion, so that the discourse may assume something like a logical shape, the parts of it appearing to grow naturally out of one another, with a definite beginning and a definite end.

This done, expand the “headings” into a speech, still bearing in mind that you are supposed to be talking, not writing. When it is completed, stand up, paper in hand, and spout your performance to the tables and chairs. Thus you will learn if it comes trippingly on the tongue, and likewise something of its sound. As

yet you need not be over critical upon its merits as a composition. Doubtless it is full of faults; somewhat stilted, flowery in language, abounding in what the Americans call "bunkum," and on the whole unsatisfactory. Every young orator falls into these faults. Fine talking and fine writing are the universal sins of inexperience, certain to be corrected by time. There is only one defect that is never cured, one fault for which there is no hope—the penny-a-lining style, significantly called "the high polite." The mind, once taken possession of by that modern jargon, never throws it off; perhaps because the infection can be caught only by a mind essentially vulgar and conceited, and the presence of it proves incapacity even for the appreciation of something better.

Your language cannot be too simple, by which I mean, plain, pure Saxon English. It is at once intelligible to the common people, and pleasing to the educated taste. It is one of the secrets of the success of all the great popular orators. English—the English of the Bible, of Shakespeare, of Defoe, of Bunyan, of Dryden, of Swift—is singularly expressive and pictorial; and being for the most part the language of daily life, it is instinctively understood by an audience who cannot pause upon a word to reflect what the speaker means by it, for this would be to fall behind him in the discourse. After you have written your imaginary speech, read it over twice or thrice, for the sole purpose of detecting and changing words for which a more homely expression can be found, and do not rest content with your performance until every foreign word for which there is a Saxon equivalent has been banished; and whenever you alight upon a "high polite" word or phrase, away with it, even if you

are obliged to substitute the longest word in the dictionary. Magniloquence is simply silly; the penny-a-lining style is horribly vulgar.

Carefully eschew metaphors, similes, and the flowers of speech. The tendency of all young orators, as of young writers, is to lavish them profusely, and inexperience is wont to measure its own merits, and perhaps the merits of others, by the extent of that kind of ornament. Good taste does not banish them altogether, but it prescribes the use of them so rarely, and only on such appropriate themes and special occasions, that your safest course will be to exclude them wholly from your first endeavours, and only to permit their introduction when you have made some progress, and where their aptitude is very apparent. A flowery speaker may attract at first, but he soon wearies; and wheresoever oratory is to be applied to the practical uses of life, as in the Senate or at the Bar, the orator who indulges largely in ornament of this kind will soon weary and disgust an audience intent upon business.

These hints for the general structure of a speech may perhaps assist you in that which I again recommend to you for your first lesson—the writing of a speech, as nearly as you can, in the very words in which you would desire to speak it.

LETTER XXXIV.

THE ART OF SPEAKING—FIRST LESSONS.

The speech being thus written, stand and speak it, giving full play to the voice, but using no action. Imagine the furniture to be an audience, and “get up” all the fervour you can to address them. The object of this is two-fold: partly to practise you in the mechanics of oratory, but mainly to enable you to detect faults in your composition that may not be discovered by the eye or the mind. When you utter it aloud, your tongue and your ear together will speedily inform you if you are wanting in some of the graces of oratory, or have indulged too much in its conceits. A sentence, smooth to the mental ear when read “to yourself,” will tune harsh discords and unpleasing notes when spoken by the tongue; a phrase that seemed most potent when you conceived it, is found to be most pitiful when you bring it forth *ore rotundo*; a sentiment that occupied a quarter of an hour in its development, stumbles upon the lips and falls flat upon the ear. As you discover these defects, mark them upon the manuscript and correct them. Then read again, and observe the improvements and the defects that remain. Treat these in the same manner, until they have disappeared and you can read right through the paper without offence to your ear or your good taste. This is all you should attempt in the form of reading. You must not use action, for it is impossible to use fit

action while the eye is fixed upon a book or paper, and ungainly movements are more easily acquired than shaken off again. The primary purpose of this lesson in self-teaching is the *composition*, and not the utterance, of a speech ;—that will be treated of presently.

When you have thus written and recited half-a-dozen speeches, you will probably compose them with increased rapidity and manifest improvement in form and language. So soon as you *feel* the thoughts flowing with ease, and shaping themselves into words without an effort, throw the pen aside and try to make a speech impromptu.

Let your first trial of impromptu speaking be with one of the subjects which you have written upon and recited as a speech. Throw the paper aside, and try to shape a speech, not by repetition from the memory, but by invention as you speak. Some memories are too powerful to permit of this ; they recall the very words that are written, and not the mere thoughts in their orderly array ; in such case it is only reading by the mental instead of the bodily eye, and the object of the practice would be lost. But when the memory is not so retentive, and recalls only *the scheme* of the composition, try to make an extempore speech on the same theme, treated in the same manner. Now, as ever, when you utter your thoughts directly from the lips, mind addressing mind through no other medium than the voice, you may use action, not studied, not even considered at the moment, but such as you adopt unconsciously. How to utter a speech, and what action to use with it, will be subjects for special consideration hereafter.

You will doubtless feel some mortification at the issue of this your first trial : it will be a failure ; your thoughts will be confused ; the words will not come, or come out

of place ; you will hesitate, stumble, and possibly break down. Be not discouraged at this ; it is the fate of all beginners of good promise. Better so than glibly to pour out a stream of weak words not freighted with ideas. There is no more fatal symptom than this sort of facility in a beginner. The limits of his success are soon found ; practice increases the rapidity and not the depth of the stream that flows from his lips. *You* have halted and stumbled and broken down, because you carried weight. You wanted to say something definite in language as definite. This is an art that does not come by nature, save perhaps to wonderful genius once in a century. Common minds must learn by experience to think clearly, to sustain continuous thought, to clothe those thoughts in words as speedily as the tongue can utter them, and then to express them in tones pleasing to those who hear. That is the accomplishment after which you are striving, and it can be attained only by perseverance and patience ; failure must precede success, and let it be your consolation that failure is the pathway to success.

Fortunately, by the method of self-teaching that I have suggested, your discomfiture will be known only to yourself. Better to break down in a private room than in a public meeting. At least, the chairs will not jeer you ; shame will not be added to disappointment. Try again ; you can afford ever so many failures in *this* arena. Briefly review the argument or plan of the speech, and then renew the effort. Mark wherein you fail ; if it is that you forget the order of the subjects, or if you cannot marshal your thoughts in orderly fashion, or if your words do not come readily or in right array. If it be that the plan of the discourse fades away from your mind, you

should assist the memory by making a very brief sketch of the successive subjects upon a slip of paper—suggestions merely of two or three words—and keep this before you, to assist you in a moment of distress, using it without scruple. Even the most practised orators may resort to this help, and most of them do so. If the fault is in the flow of the words, there is no such remedy—indeed, I can suggest none to you but practice. And so with the orderly array of words; this, too, is partly a gift of nature, but to be vastly improved by cultivation; and even where nature is defective, labour and long practice will cure the defect, as may be seen at the Bar, where it is of continual occurrence that men, who at the beginning appeared to be almost wanting in words, and who were unable to put the simplest thought into the plainest language, by much practice become correct and easy, if not positively fluent, speakers.

I assume that you have *something to say* when I throw out these hints to you for learning to say it. If your mind is vacant of thought, it is in vain that you attempt to become an orator; better abandon that ambition, and devote yourself to some mechanical pursuit for which nature has more fitted you. But be not in too great a hurry to arrive at the conclusion that your case is hopeless. The thoughts may be there, but lying in confusion, or not sufficiently definite; or they may be slow to move, or difficult to marshal; all these are defects to be cured; if only the thoughts are there in some shape, you can learn, with more or less of labour, to bring them into use. If, for instance, you find that with your pen you can express something sensible upon any theme, you may be assured that you *can* do the like with your tongue, and that the obstacle, wherever it is, may be removed by

skill and diligence. Your case is only hopeless when, after many trials, you can find nothing to say, and worse still, when words come freighted with nothing but sound and fury.

If it be that the thoughts are there, but you cannot evoke them, the remedy is to write—write—write—until the mind falls into the habit of thinking definitely and orderly, and of yielding up its thoughts readily. The process is slow, but it is certain. You may not measure your progress week by week, but compare month by month, and you will discover the improvement. Try it by time. Note how many minutes are occupied in filling a page of your paper; a month afterwards note them again, and so forth, and you will see what progress you have made. Compare the composition of this month with that of last month, and you will learn the steady advance in precision and power of expression. When you can *write* with tolerable fluency, begin again the attempt to *speak*. At first you may be baffled, for such is the strange force of habit, that ideas which flow fast through the pen often refuse to come to the lips. But this is only a habit, and may be disturbed by the same repetition that formed it. Persist in the attempt to speak readily what you have written without difficulty. Begin by asking yourself this question, “What is it I want to say on this subject: what should I say were I to write it?” Answer the question aloud—not, in the first instance, standing up, but sitting down, in the very attitude in which you would have written, lacking only the pen and paper. Utter aloud, in any words that offer, the idea you have to express. Repeat it two or three times. Then stand up and repeat it again; still not oratorically, but as if you were telling a friend in ordinary

conversation what are your notions on the particular topic. Then repeat it in more formal phraseology, and with some of the tones of a speech; and, finally, try to make a speech of it. This is a tedious process, it is true; but the defect to be conquered is formidable, and can only be cured by patient perseverance.

All these first lessons in oratory are to be practised in *private*. They are designed as preliminary training to the public exercise, which is certainly more efficient, because there is about it the stimulus of reality; but it produces also the nervousness that so often leads to failure, and you face the unpleasant consequences of failure itself where more persons will certainly be found to laugh at you than to pity you. These suggestions are not designed as a substitute for the ordeal of actual practice, but only to induce such preparation for practice as will make success more certain. If nothing more, it will save you from that ignominious failure, the fear of which has deterred hundreds who really possessed the capacities of an orator, and the experience of which has sent many a promising man back into obscurity, whence he has not found courage again to emerge, although there was in him the material out of which success might have been achieved, had he taken proper pains to prepare for the trial.

LETTER XXXV.

PUBLIC SPEAKING.

You may now make your first attempt to speak in public.

If possible, select the occasion. Do not trust yourself to say something about anything—which usually amounts to saying nothing—but avail yourself of the discussion of a subject to which you have given some thought, and on which you can say something.

Turn the subject over in your mind ; think how you shall treat it ; from what point of view you may best approach it ; how you should arrange your ideas upon it, so that they may be presented in orderly array, linked into a chain of argument.

Having planned it roughly in thought, put your plan upon paper.

But *only* in outline. Do not provide the words ; note down nothing but the subjects to be treated, with the order of treatment. Trust entirely to the impulse of the moment to provide words wherein to express your thoughts ; but let those thoughts be firmly fixed in your memory.

Some famous orators are accustomed, in addition to this outline of the argument, to compose the peroration and recite it from memory. It is, however, a course of doubtful expediency at all times, and I would especially counsel you, as a beginner, *not* to resort to it.

There are many objections to a written speech. In the first place, you are dependent upon your memory, and if that should fail, your discomfiture is complete—you break down altogether! Few memories are so perfect as to preserve their power when the mind is otherwise disturbed. The fear of failure is very likely to be the cause of failure. A single word forgotten produces alarm and hesitation, and while you are trying to recall that word, others fade away, and in the accumulated confusion a whole sentence disappears. You hesitate, you stammer, you try back—in the hopeless chaos you are lost. From this danger the speaker of a written speech is never safe; it may occur at any moment, and the result is always humiliating.

But there is another objection to written speeches—they can never be effective; for this reason, that they are projected by a process altogether different from that of an extempore speech. What you have first written, then committed to memory, and now proceed to deliver by the lips, you utter by a process that is little better than mechanical. The memory is the only mental faculty engaged in the operation, and your whole attention is concentrated upon the work of recalling the words you have learned. This process within you is distinctly manifested to your audience; it is betrayed in face, in tone, in gesture, and your speech, wanting soul, fails to move soul.

But when you speak from the prompting of your intellect, the whole mind is engaged in the operation; you say what you think, or feel, at the moment of utterance, and therefore you say it in the tones and with the expression that nature prompts, without an effort on your part. It is a law of our being that mind is

moved by mind. There is a secret sympathy by which emotion answers to emotion, and your feelings stir the like feelings in your fellow-man. But no feigned emotions, however skilfully enacted, can accomplish this. You may greatly admire the skill of the performer and look upon him with admiration as an artist, but you do not *feel* with him.

Again, the language of a written speech is altogether different from extempore expression. The mind, when it discourses through the pen, throws itself, as it were, into a different attitude from that which it assumes when speaking through the lips. The structure of the sentences is different; the words are different; there is a difference in the array of the thoughts. Written composition is obedient to rules. There are certain conventional forms of expression, so unlike the language of speaking that they betray themselves instantly to a practised ear. Although an unskilled audience might not know the cause, the effect is shown in a sense of uneasiness, and we complain of stiffness and dulness in the orator. Therefore, never *write* a speech, but only give it careful thought and set down the heads of it in the order in which you propose to treat them.

Thus armed, and screwing up your courage for an ordeal whose severity I have no wish to underrate, go to the meeting at which you are to make the first real trial of your capabilities. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and therefore I will tell you what you will feel.

If the audience be a large one, so much the better; it is easier to address a crowd than a small company. You are not scared by the multitude of eyes, but by the fixed gaze of a limited circle. The aspect of an assembly

from a platform is very remarkable. Being raised so much above them, and all faces being turned up and eyes fixed on you, the consciousness of personality is lost; you recognise nobody in particular, and the whole seems like one personage having as many eyes as a fly. No beginner ever looked on this sea of eyes without more or less of fear, or when he looked at it saw anything but eyes. Try to make the scene familiar by an attentive survey of it while you are waiting your turn to speak, if that be possible when you are intently thinking what you will say and how you will say it. Anxious you will be, if there is anything in you; some fear is inseparable from the modesty that accompanies genuine capacity; but, in spite of anxiety and fear, let it be your resolve to go on, come what come may.

At length your turn comes. As the time of trial approaches, your heart will begin to flutter, then to thump audibly against your ribs, and there will be a curious creeping of the flesh, growing almost to a shiver, while your cheeks are burning and your head is throbbing. You stand up. Your knees tremble; your hand shakes; the sea of eyes swims before you and vanishes into a mist; you are conscious of nothing but the lights. Suddenly your tongue becomes dry, and, worse than all, your memory fails you, and you feel it to be failing. Be thankful now that you have not trusted your speech to it. These symptoms have been experienced, more or less, by every man who has achieved the art of oratory; and some I have known who never escaped from them entirely—the trembling knees and parched tongue attending the first sentences uttered in all their speeches, however frequent. Few there are who succeed in avoiding them altogether.

But go on. Say something, however dislocated or unmeaning; anything is better than silence. A little hesitation at the beginning of a speech is never unbecoming, and often is highly effective. One of the best and most practised speakers I ever listened to opened with stammering voice and imperfect sentences, and seemed continually on the point of breaking down; but, as he warmed in the work, words began to flow and self-possession to return, until he rose to eloquence that held his audience in delighted thralldom for three hours. In this, as in all the business of life, he who has not courage to fail may not hope to achieve success. Do not venture at all unless you are resolved to go through with it. Even if you cannot collect yourself sufficiently to say the sensible things you intended to say, do not give it up, but talk on; for you may be assured of this, that half your audience will give you credit for having some meaning in your words, though they cannot exactly find it out, and if words come freely will think you a fine speaker, regardless of their sense or nonsense. There is but one hopeless failure—coming to a full stop. But it is probable that, after you have conquered the first terror at the consciousness of lost memory and scattered thoughts, when you find your audience still patient and listening, your self-command will return and you will make a triumphant ending.

Whatever the issue of that first trial, try again. Be not daunted even by failure. Practice will overcome all difficulties. If you have planned a formal speech, the structure of it will be present to your mind; if you throw yourself upon the inspiration of the moment, thoughts will arise as they are summoned, and where thoughts are, words will not be wanting.

Do not, as many do, make preparation for your speeches on *all* occasions, great or little. There is a time for *talking*, and a time for *speaking*, and a time for making a set *oration*. Choose your time and adapt yourself to the subject. Nothing is more indecorous than a flight of oratory out of place. The occasions that properly demand an oration rarely offer even to the most practised speaker. The larger portion of your speeches will be upon commonplace themes or matters of business, when your address should be but lengthened talk. To do this well is as difficult and almost as rare as to make a great speech on a great topic. I purpose to describe this particularly when I come to treat of the various forms of oratory. The subject at present under consideration is your general practice as a beginner, and how best you may perfect yourself in the art of speaking, without reference to the special applications of it, which will be considered when we have reviewed the accomplishments you should labour to acquire.

LETTER XXXVI.

DELIVERY.

ACQUIRE the art of saying *something* so as to be understood by your audience without much effort and without hesitation for words or thoughts, before you study *how* to say it. In the due order of learning, manner should follow matter. If you attempt to learn both at the same time, you will probably fail in both. You will find it quite as much as you can do, at the beginning of your practice, to concentrate your mind upon the production of thoughts and words. If to this you add the labour of thinking how you should utter this sentence, and what action you should assume with that, you will be in danger of losing the thread of your discourse. Not until practice has given you self-command and an orderly flow of ideas and ready words, should you make a study of *manner*.

I say, "make a study" of it, because a great deal comes by nature. When you feel, and speak what you feel, there is a natural language of emotion that expresses itself unconsciously: and often most perfectly where there has been the least teaching. But, although this will help you to a certain extent, it will not do to rely upon it entirely, and for the reason that a very considerable portion of your oratory will be expended on subjects that do not excite the feelings, in which case your success will depend upon the form wherein you set common-

places before your audience. Moreover, the orator, endowed with the best natural graces may learn something from art, which is—or ought to be—the lesson of combined experience and reflection. My present purpose is to give you some hints for *delivery* of a speech, preparatory to the concluding letters on the characteristics of the various kinds of oratory.

The first consideration is, to make yourself heard. This is no such easy matter as you may suppose. Go to any assembly where there is a diversity of speakers, and especially if among them there are many amateurs, and you will find that, standing at a distant part of the room, you can hear nothing but an inarticulate murmur. Even with those whose business it is to be speakers, as clergymen and lawyers, this is a frequent failing. The orators and their friends set it to the account of weak lungs. That is a delusion. Such a physical defect may occur now and then; but in nine cases in ten the lungs have nothing at all to do with it; the fault is wholly in the *management* of the voice; the notes are there, but the speaker will not open his mouth and send them out.

You must begin by measuring the space you are to fill. To do this there is no need to count by rule, or to say to yourself, “those people are so many yards from me; I must raise my voice so much.” There is no scale determining that such a tone is good for so many feet, and such another for so many more. But there is something better than a rule to guide you. Nature teaches you. If you do not think about it, by a kind of instinct you proportion your voice to the distance from you of the person you address. If, therefore, you would be heard by the whole assembly, look at the most distant person, and address *him*. In obedience to this law of the voice, it

will adapt itself to the distance, and, being heard by him, you must be heard by all.

If, upon trial of this, you find that your voice still fails to be thrown so far, or that it requires a painful exertion on your part, you may know that there is some defect in the management of your voice, and you should proceed to search for it, with resolve to remove it.

First, assure yourself that you are not too loud. There is a degree of loudness that both stifles your own voice and deafens your audience. If the making of the sound is an effort, you may be sure that you are too loud. Remember that you are seeking to convey to your audience articulate sounds, distinguished by the most delicate shades of sound, which disappear when the voice is raised beyond a certain pitch. The actors in the largest theatres do not speak *loud*, but they speak *out*, and they speak *clearly*, in a key slightly raised above that used in a room. This is your rule also. Speak *up* ; speak *out*.

Open your mouth ; do not speak through your teeth, or your nose ; neither mutter, nor whine, nor snuffle. Take especial pains to shun these frequent faults, and invite some honest friend to tell you plainly if he can detect any traces of either in your manner. If so it be, strive earnestly to shake them off at the beginning, for they grow into incurable habits with formidable rapidity. Continue to consult your friend's ear until every trace of them shall be removed.

There is much in the *tone* of a speaker's voice ; next to words it most influences an audience. The same thing said in two different tones will have entirely different effects, and even convey different meanings. Undoubtedly nature in this is more potent than art. Some voices are naturally incompetent to express great variances of tone,

although the failure is more frequently in the feeling than in the voice. The latter is not in the right tone because the former is not in the right place. It is difficult to prescribe any rules for acquiring tone, for it is not so much an art as an instinct. Tone is nature's language. The best advice I can give you is to cultivate it by cultivating the emotions by which it is attuned. Cherish fine sympathies with God, and nature, and humanity, with all that is holy, and good, and beautiful, and the feelings so kindled will utter themselves in true tones, that will touch the kindred chords in those who listen to you.

For practice, read aloud passages of oratory, or in the drama, that embody stirring emotions; thence you will learn confidence in yourself when you require to express the real and not the simulated feeling.

Another rule is to raise your voice at the end of every sentence, instead of dropping it, as is the unpleasant habit of our countrymen. I have already remarked upon this when treating of reading, but I must recur to it here, lest its application also to speaking should be overlooked. It is good for yourself and for your audience. It compels you to maintain an even range of voice, which, if declining at the close of a sentence, is apt to begin the next sentence somewhat lower than the preceding one, until the entire pitch of the voice declines, insensibly to yourself. The practice of raising the voice at the close of the sentence should therefore be cherished until it becomes a habit, and is performed without an effort and even without consciousness on your part.

The natural defects of voice, as hoarseness, harshness and squeaking, can scarcely be prescribed for by written rules. They may be cured, though rarely; they may

in all cases be *relieved* by judicious teaching and patient effort. But always a teacher should be sought. The sufferer is not likely to be conscious of his defect, and his own ear is too much accustomed to it to inform him if the remedy is prospering. Let him apply to some experienced teacher of elocution, who will put him through the course of training necessary to subdue the mischief, and who will listen as he speaks and lead him by slow steps to improvement.

More important to clear speaking than even command of the voice is distinct *articulation*. You must study to pronounce, not words only, but syllables, and even letters. In the rapidity of talk, rightly used in conversation, we English habitually clip our words, slur our syllables, and skip our letters. The genius of our spoken language is for abbreviation; we cut short every sound capable of condensation, and cast off every superfluous word. It is for this reason that written discourse is so different from spoken thought as to make it almost impossible so to write a speech, and afterwards to repeat it from memory, that a critical ear shall not discover the presence of the pen. The composition of a speech lies midway between the written essay and common talk. It is less formal than the one, but more orderly than the other. So, in the utterance of a speech, you should give its full expression to every sound, still avoiding the opposite faults of affectation and drawling. Beware that you do not run your words together; strive that each syllable shall be fully breathed; give to the letters, or rather to the conventional utterance of the words, the complete expression, having especial regard for your *r's*. The reason for this is, that your audience must follow your thoughts as well

as your words, and if you put them to so much as a momentary pause to seize the words, the process of translating them into thoughts cannot be performed in time to catch the next words that come from you. For the same reason it is necessary that you should speak deliberately. The most frequent fault of orators is speaking too rapidly; their ideas flow faster than the tongue can express them, and in the eagerness to catch them before they are tripped up by successors, the organ of speech is urged to its utmost speed, and the words come tumbling one over the other, to the bewilderment of the audience, who could tell you of your discourse only that they had heard a mass of things, but nothing clearly.

For the study of articulation and deliberation in utterance I must remit you to the preceding hints for reading. The art may be best acquired, and evil habits that impede it best cured, by the practice of reading aloud, observing the precepts for good reading.

But reading will not remedy too much rapidity when it is caused by crowding of thoughts. Book in hand, you receive the thoughts of the writer, and having to deal with them alone, you may easily learn to reproduce them at any pace you please. Hence a too slow reader may be, and is often, a too fast speaker. A fault having such an origin can be cured only by attacking the cause. You must check the stream of thoughts, if you can. The problem is, how to do this. Having experience of the defect, I have given a great deal of consideration to devising a cure for it. I must own that I have been unsuccessful. Good resolutions have proved of no avail. During the process of speaking, the mind is so engrossed by its one business of thinking, and clothing its thoughts

in words, that rules and resolves are forgotten, and it goes to work in its own way, according to its nature. But although unsuccessful in checking the current of ideas, something may be done to control them by a pre-arranged plan of treatment. If you will keep well before you the order of your topics, your thoughts will marshal themselves according to that scheme, and in this process will incur less danger of tripping up one another. This involuntary falling into rank is not to be acquired by any rules or teachings, but is learned by long practice teaching self-command, and encouraged by the resolve never to speak without a plan distinctly formed in your mind before you open your lips.

Lastly, study *variety* of tone and of expression. There is nothing so dreary as monotony of voice. A bad speech delivered with various expression is infinitely more effective than a good speech spoken in one unbroken key and unvarying tone. Give to every sentence its appropriate expression; gravity to the grave, gaiety to the gay. Raise your voice when you desire your audience to mark some passage; sometimes lower your voice, especially when you desire to express emotions. Your tones should be continually changing, like notes in music, to which indeed they are the equivalent in oratory—only let them be apt to the subject. This incessant play of the voice is the latest triumph of the orator. All beginners want the courage to follow even their own impulses; their fear of failure keeps them from turning to the right or left out of the path that goes straight to the end. But, as experience gives confidence, and the dread of breaking down departs, little by little, cautiously at first, and afterwards more boldly, you will venture upon variations of expression that will

be equally a relief to yourself and your audience. This is not an accomplishment for which any rules can be suggested: it is not to be taught by a master nor learned by rote; it can be achieved only by practice, by the general cultivation of the taste and the intellect, and perfected only by experience.

LETTER XXXVII.

ACTION.

ACTION—Action—Action; this, according to the high authority of the greatest orator of whom history bears record, is the first, second, and third precept of oratory.

To be plain with you, this is what in your college phrase you would term—bosh. It is just one of those sayings which men have taken upon trust and repeated from generation to generation, without looking into it to see how much truth lies at the bottom of it. Action is something certainly, but it is *not* everything. There can be no effective oratory without it; but it is not the substance of oratory, nor even its principal ingredient. It is simply one of its ornaments, to be used with discretion. True it is, that very stupid people may take a wind-bag in convulsions for an orator, thinking that a man so physically demonstrative must be uttering wonderful thoughts; but all who can understand what is said look for some sense and are not satisfied with mere sound and fury; the test of an orator is, if he can hold the *ear* and stir the *heart*, and not how he can make the eye stare and the mouth gape: a mountebank at a fair would win still more than he of that kind of vulgar wonder.

But action is nevertheless a necessary adjunct—a grace to be sedulously cultivated; a charm that adds immensely to the effect of speech. It attracts the attention

the flow of the speaker's
 is accomplished I can-
 will admit that so it is.
 the mind; indeed, the
 within to express itself
 such thoughts as address
 and these should be the

but the first step to action
 but it is a truth, and there
 learn—for self-command and
 A great actor, to whom I
 hints on this subject, told
 learned on the stage; that
 experienced in acting, know how
 we might measure an actor's
 observing if he stands still, with
 a natural attitude, when he has
 is precisely so with speakers. They
 Manifestly they know not what to do
 and their feet, and look as if they had
 than how to pose them; they fidget
 there; shift from one awkwardness to
 the hands into the waistcoat, or under
 or into the pockets, and try with the feet
 unknown to the drill-sergeant. The only
 y do *not* assume is—no attitude at all, but
 at grace of the human figure in repose—the
 "stand-at-ease" position of our drill, and
 down at the sides, just as they
 own weight. "*This* is the whole
 still," said my instructor; and having
 and closely observed it in others, I can

echo his instructions, and cordially commend them to you.

When you stand still, your attitude must be one of relaxation, or you will have the aspect of a cataleptic stiffened into a statue, not of one willingly at rest. Carefully avoid the starched and strained posture of "attention" in the ranks, where every limb betrays effort. The pose of standing still is the *relaxation* of every muscle. You must feel at ease, look at ease; the body upright, but firmly set, the arms lying at your side in their natural fall, the head slightly elevated and thrown back, and the chest expanded. I am thus minute, because this is the "first position" in the art of oratory, and having learned it you will more readily advance from stillness to action. To be still seems easy enough when described in words, but you will find it somewhat difficult to attain in practice. It is, however, worth some effort to acquire. Not that you will often have need to adopt it upon the platform, but it is the foundation of effective action. If you can *stand still* becomingly, you will be almost sure to *move* gracefully.

Moreover, this is the pose that gives you the freest use of your voice. The chest cannot play freely unless the body is upright and the shoulders are thrown back; on the play of the chest depends the power of the lungs alike to express and to endure. So the elevated head is necessary to the resonance as well as to the delicate shades of sound made by that marvellous instrument through which the infinite variations of thought find their appropriate expression. In action these positions must be preserved; the change is mainly in the play of the arms and the turn of the head. If you accustom yourself from the beginning to keep an open chest and a

free throat, you will have made a mighty stride towards success. But to master these you must master the first position in action—*standing still*.

Begin quietly. Your action should rise with your emotions, and these should swell as you warm with your theme. If you commence with much action, you must either fail to appear as growing in energy at the right place, or you will be compelled to extravagant action, with imminent risk of lapsing into the ludicrous. The favourite parliamentary position of the arms crossed upon the chest is a good one for the opening of a speech, for it expresses confidence, and therefore creates confidence. But merely to stand still is not unfitted for the start, and it has an aspect of deference for the audience that bespeaks their favour. This is, however, a matter of choice, in which you should consult your own ease. From this position you may depart with the first sentence you desire to emphasise, and especially at the close of it, by slowly extending the arms and with the same equable motion restoring them to their first position. Presently (observing still the rule that action should be used only in aid of the voice where special expression is sought to be given to what you say) you should throw your arms apart, using them with increasing frequency, but remembering that the use of both arms at the same time indicates the extremest energy, and therefore you should lift but one for the less emphatic sentences.

But *how* to use them? That is the difficulty. I have endeavoured to reduce to words some definite hints for that purpose, and I have been unable to do so to my own satisfaction. I fear that this portion of the art cannot be taught by written lessons, but only by instructions conveyed through the eye. I cannot tell you

what your action ought to be, I can only offer to you a few hints by way of warning what to avoid in action.

Shun uniformity. Some speakers merely wave the hand up and down, or to and fro, in one even and measured sweep, as if they were beating time to music. Pray you avoid it. Do not *saw the air*, as Hamlet terms it. Do not stick your thumbs in your waist-coat, nor thrust your hands under the tail of your coat, nor twirl a thread, nor play with a pen. Of these inelegancies there are eminent examples among the foremost orators of this generation. An impressive, because expressive, action, if used at a fit place, is a thump with the hand upon the table, or of one hand against the other, when you want to give extraordinary emphasis to some word or point in the sentence. There is a natural language of the limbs as well as of the voice, and if you observe that you will not err. The difficulty, you will say, is to remember the rule when your thoughts are busily engaged in constructing your speech, and you cannot at once think of what you shall say and how you shall say it. Happily for you, this natural action is instinctive. It follows the feelings and accompanies the words. You have nothing to do but to give it free play, by removing all ungainly habits, all artificial action, whatever affectations you may have been taught by ignorant and pedantic masters, and having put yourself in the best position for the muscles to act, you may leave the manner of their action to the impulses of nature.

You will ask why it is, if nature prompts the right action, so few orators are found to practise it. My answer is, that they have not trusted to nature. Either they have sought to make an art of action and learn it by rules; or, they do not feel what they say, but are

speaking by rote ; or, they have fallen into bad habits at the beginning, before they were sufficiently confident to let Nature speak her own language ; or, they are still so wanting in self-command that, as it is with beginners, fear impedes the free motions that nature prompts.

I might address to you an entire letter upon this natural language of the limbs, describing how the various motions naturally express themselves in attitude as in voice ; but it would be of no practical service to you. If I were to tell you that, in denunciation of a wrong, the arms are naturally thrown into this or that position, you would not be much the wiser. You could not learn to assume a posture by a preconcerted plan, and the impulse would not arise one whit the more rapidly, nor more certainly shape itself into action, because you know beforehand that so it ought to be. Therefore, I conclude these hints for action by repeating, that you must banish all acquired action, shake off all awkwardness and irregularities of movement, study gracefulness in the motion of the limbs, and especially of the arms, resolutely learn *to stand still*, and then trust to nature to prompt the action suited to the word and the thought.

LETTER XXXVIII.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SPEECH.

A SPEECH is a work of art, to be constructed in accordance with certain laws of taste—æsthetically (if you like the word better than our old-fashioned English one)—having a definite design and shape, and forming a whole made up of distinct parts, which you, when delivering, can contemplate as a whole, and which may be comprehended and remembered as a whole by your audience.

In this I refer only to a speech, properly so called—a set oration on a subject reflected upon and matured beforehand; for otherwise it is with remarks thrown out in the course of a debate—interpellations, as the French term them—matters of business, which are nothing more than standing-up talk; and replies, which differ from either. In the hints I am about to offer to you for the construction of a speech, I refer to a formal speech, to which I do not give the title of oration only because that has come to be read as a very big word, the use of which would be looked upon as boastful, and therefore I prefer to call it by the more modest name of “a speech;” but I mean “an oration” nevertheless.

It must have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The beginning is the most difficult. You are led up to the after parts of your discourse, but you must begin by leading up to the main subject. It will not do to plunge abruptly into it; there should be always an opening,

designed to attract the attention of the audience and excite their interest in what you are about to say. Be not argumentative at the beginning, or you will certainly repel the sympathies of a considerable majority of the assembly, who are in truth incapable of following the steps of an argument, or of understanding it when it is completed. If the subject permits, begin lightly, almost playfully; assume, both in language and manner, a great deal of deference for your audience, even if you do not feel it; your present business is to win their favour, so to secure a patient hearing, and there is nothing so effective as the silent flattery that assures the good people before you that you court the approval of their judgments. *Talk about the subject, but do not treat of it.* Show what interest it has for *them*, and how profoundly it affects you—insomuch that you are urged to speak upon it by the impulses of conviction and feeling; that it fills your mind to overflow, so that you cannot help pouring it into their ears and striving to enlist their sympathies.

Having thus cleared the way, you enter upon the subject itself, and your manner of treating it will vary with every variety of topic, so that it is impossible to suggest any form of treatment applicable to all. Here, again, I can do little more than attempt to throw together a few practical hints what to do and what to avoid, leaving the substantial structure of the work to your own good taste.

You must have an argument, and yet you must not appear to argue. The order of your thoughts must be logical, but you must shun the shape of logic. Your aim is to convince and to persuade; but conviction is not produced by close reasoning; it is the result of a pleasant mixture of facts and broadly-drawn deductions

from them, which carry the listener's mind to your end, without consciousness on his part of the particular steps by which you have done so. In your own mind you must have a distinct conception of the chain of reasoning by which you propose to travel to the conclusion; but your art will be shown in concealing this from the audience. The result is accomplished by a judicious mingling of narrative with argument, gaiety with gravity, humour with poetry, familiar talk with occasional flashes of eloquence. Variety is the soul of a speech, and is, above all things, to be studied—the skill of the great orator being shown in the direction of every phase of his discourse, however apparently divergent, to the proposition he is maintaining. Remember that nothing is so wearisome as monotony. We tire of too much eloquence, and a speech of brilliant sentences would be intolerable. Too many passages of the finest poetry pall the ear. You cannot be kept constantly grinning, and how glad everybody is to escape from solemnity is shown by the wretched jokes that suffice to throw a court of justice into roars of laughter. In a speech, there is nothing more useful than interspersions of anecdote. Narrate some facts. There are many people in all companies who can understand nothing else. They can see little in an argument, but they can appreciate a fact. It so happened to somebody somewhere, after he had done something. That settles the question in such minds, and they are not a few. You win at least half your audience by a striking anecdote, perhaps utterly worthless as evidence, to a reasoning mind, but it amuses and relieves the strained thoughts of even your more reflecting listeners. When occasion permits, throw in a little eloquence, but not too long nor too frequently. There is

nothing in the art of speaking more difficult to manage than this. A flowery discourse is offensive to good taste, but a dash of poetry may be permitted when you appeal to the feelings. In narrative, also, it is sometimes desirable to embellish description with pictorial language, and you may clothe sentiments in ornamental phrases. But these flights should never be long continued, and they should appear as accidents only, not as the substance of your discourse. The mention of pictorial language reminds me that a speech should be interspersed with pictures. You are aware, that every human being, not an idiot, is competent to conceive a picture, while few are capable of comprehending an abstract idea, and fewer still of following out a closely-linked chain of argument. You may see this shown in a striking manner by children, who will listen intently to stories that paint pictures upon their minds, and receive repetitions of the same story, however frequent, with even more than the interest felt in it at the first telling. A considerable portion of the grown-up people are only "children of larger growth," and retain the childish love of pictorial narrative. You must submit to gratify this taste if you would please a miscellaneous audience. Tell them something in the way of a story, something you or some other persons have seen or done, painting with your words upon their minds a picture of the scene you are describing. Do not be afraid of staleness or repetition—it is wonderful how often audiences will laugh at the same jest, and listen with interest to the same story. Thus with a mixture of argument, narrative, poetry, eloquence, jest and earnestness, you will compound the middle, or substance, of a speech.

Having said all that you have to say, or, at least, as

much as you ought to say, you come to *the Peroration*, which, in a set speech, should be a finale with a flourish of trumpets. It is permissible and safe to write *this* part of an oration, and confide it to the memory, for it is too difficult a composition to be entrusted wholly to the impulse of the moment. If a formal peroration is attempted, it must be excellent, or it will be worse than useless. It is an ambitious effort, and to fail in it is to expose yourself to merciless ridicule. The most brilliant speech would be marred by an ending that left your audience laughing *at* you. Therefore, think well before you adopt a peroration, for it is not necessary to a speech, though very desirable, because highly effective; but having resolved upon it, spare no pains to perfect it. Write and re-write until it approves itself to your taste, and recite it aloud, to try how it comes to your tongue and sounds in your ears; for you will find that sentences, seeming excellent when mentally read, are often very ineffective when actually expressed by the lips.

The Peroration should not be the summing-up of your argument, but rather the pointing of it to its purpose—the moral of what you have been saying commended to the regards of your audience. Your speech had been addressed to convince and persuade by many arguments and illustrations; the peroration should be the concentrated sum of all you have sought to urge, clad in glowing colours, appealing to the moral sentiments, the human feelings, and even, where the occasion permits, to the passions, of your hearers. Its object is to excite them to acceptance of your argument, by exalting their conceptions of the importance of your theme, or to move them to action in accordance with the purposes for which you are addressing them. Whatever you say should

have one of these definite designs. Merely fine words are merely impertinences.

Then, a Peroration should grow in power and brilliancy as it advances, until it culminates in a climax. Having once soared in it, you must not sink again to the level of plain prose, but maintain the stream of poetry or passion, with a gradual swell, if you can, but evenly at the least, reserving your most striking thought and powerful language for the conclusion, as your last words will be likely to live longest in the memory.

In this, as in all the parts of a speech, employ the simplest language: not only is it usually the grandest, but, being intelligible to all, it best attains your purpose with all, and wins many supporters who would have been insensible to the language of scholarship. There is no emotion that cannot be more forcibly expressed, no narrative that cannot be more vividly painted, in our Saxon vernacular, than in the best classical dialect of the library. Avoid, also, long and involved sentences; they are perplexing to a reader, but to a listener they are unintelligible. The speech that is most effective with an audience is that spoken in short sentences, constructed in the form of uttered, not in that of written, thoughts—each sentence complete in itself and containing a single proposition.

A formal peroration is not *necessary* even to a formal oration, although it is so great an ornament that, if you have time to prepare it, you should on no account omit to do so. But, better far to have none than an imperfect one. Do it thoroughly or not at all, and, I repeat, do not trust it to the impulse of the moment. If you have not come prepared with it, dispense with it altogether, and avoid anything like a pretence of it in speeches that

are not orations—but the utterance of the thoughts of the moment on a subject suddenly presented.

For such cases you must acquire another art, much more difficult than you would think it to be—the *Art of Sitting Down*.

How few speakers have mastered this! How few know *when* to stop, or *how* to stop! How often do we see those who have spoken well mar the effect of all that has gone before by an unhappy ending. They wind up feebly, or, which is worse, they do not wind up at all. They appear to be coming to a close, but, just when we expect them to sit down, they start off again upon some new path and wander about drearily, perhaps repeat this process many times, to the sore trial of the patience of the audience, and withal are further than ever from the end they seek. Strive to avoid such a calamity. Better any defect at the close, than a protracted ending. If you have not got up a formal climax, content yourself with stopping when you have said what you have to say, even although it may not be with the flourish you desire. If you do not win a burst of applause, you will give no offence. You will obtain credit for good sense, at least, if not for eloquence; and certainly the former is the more useful faculty for the vast majority of purposes for which the Art of Speaking is required to be exercised in the business of life. Even with professional orators, such as statesmen and lawyers, for once that a formal *oration* is demanded, a sensible *speech* is required twenty times.

LETTER XXXIX.

THE ORATORY OF THE PULPIT.

HAVING described to you the general form of a speech, how it should be spoken, and what faults you should endeavour to avoid in framing and speaking it, I turn now to the special features of special kinds of oratory ; for each one has characteristics of its own which demand the special study of those who will be required to practise it, in addition to the studies of oratory as an art, to which I have endeavoured, in the preceding letters, to direct your attention.

The principal forms of oratory, whose special characteristics I propose to describe, are the oratory of the Pulpit, of the Bar, of the Senate, of the Platform, and of the Table. Of these only three are of immediate interest to you ; another may, I hope, some day be required ; the first will be a not uninteresting nor uninformative study, if only as assisting your actual judgment of the merits of popular preachers. But these letters would have been incomplete had the oratory of the pulpit found no place here.

The Pulpit Orator differs from all other orators in this, that he is not open to answer, and therefore has it all his own way, and that he speaks, not merely as a man offering his own opinions to other men, but as one who bears a message from a higher authority than his own.

Moreover he may assume that his congregation are in

substantial agreement with him, or they would not be gathered there; consequently he has no need to prove his title to them. He is before them of his own right, they acknowledge his mission to be their teacher, they must hear him out, or, at least, sit him out; neither dissent nor disapprobation can be expressed; the most transparent fallacies will pass unchallenged, the feeblest arguments provoke no reply.

At the first survey of this unique position, nothing would seem to be more favourable for oratory. More than that, the subjects of which the preacher treats are of the mightiest moment to all his hearers; the highest and the humblest have an equal interest in the world against whose temptations he warns, and in the heaven to whose joys he invites. There is not a human weakness nor virtue, not a passion, nor a sentiment, that does not come legitimately within the sphere of his discourse; whatever is nearest and dearest to us, whatever we most desire or most dread, all that is known and all that is unknown, the busy present and the great dark future, are his to wield at his will, for winning, for deterring, for attracting, or for terrifying. He can persuade, or excite, or awe, his hearers at his pleasure; his theme prompts to poetry; he may resort to all wonders of Nature and Art for illustrations, and, if he comprehends the grandeur of his mission, he has the stimulus of consciousness that, with God's blessing, the words he utters will save souls.

But, these advantages notwithstanding, *good* pulpit oratory is more rare than any other. Probably fifty thousand sermons are preached in the United Kingdom every Sunday, but of these how many fulfil the requirements of the Art of Speaking? How many really fine sermons, finely delivered, has the oldest of us heard in

the course of his life, even if he has been a regular church-goer? He might almost count them on his fingers. Certainly, if the preachers be enumerated and not the sermons, they would not number ten. I can say, for my own part, that having sought for them I have been unable to find them. It is not too much to assert that forty-nine out of fifty were prosy, inartistic, unattractive to mind or ear, drawling and slumberous, droning out dreary platitudes in dullest language, unenlivened by a flash of eloquence or a spark of poetry. To listen to them is an effort; and the result of the effort is pain—pain to the intellect, which is unrewarded; pain to the taste, which is offended; pain to the ear, which is wearied. Added to these is a certain sense of annoyance at a noble opportunity lost, and the involuntary comparison of what that discourse might and should have been with what it is.

Why pulpit oratory is so feeble and its power so stricken, is a question of great interest, well deserving a more extended inquiry than it has yet received; but it does not come within the province of these letters. The fact suffices, that the branch of oratory which ought to be at the summit of the art, and to exhibit more and greater orators than any other, in practice falls below the rest, and produces fewer claimants to the title. At present my purpose is to describe, briefly, the special features of the Art of Oratory in the Pulpit.

I have hinted above that the business of the preacher is much more to persuade than to convince. As a rule, his audience are already believers of the same creed with himself. They are his congregation because his belief is presumed to be identical with theirs. He has no need, therefore, to plunge into arguments directed to show

that some persons there present are wrong and to convince them that he is right. It is the speciality of the pulpit orator's discourse that he is exempted from the necessity, imposed upon all other orators, of addressing himself to those who differ from him, more or less, and of seeking to convince them by argument, with that liability to instant attack and defeat, which is the safest restraint against feebleness and fallacy. Consequently, as the rule, subject, of course, to rare exceptions, the business of pulpit oratory is *persuasion*.

To *convince*, you address the *reason*; to *persuade*, you appeal to the *emotions*. In the one case, you call upon your audience to reflect and pronounce a calm impartial judgment; in the other, you desire that they should not think, but feel, surrendering their judgments to you. The preacher's title to do this is founded upon the tacit assumption that his audience and himself hold substantially the same creed, and that it is his vocation to excite in them a sense of its grandeur and importance, and to stir them to thought and action in accordance with its precepts. To these the preacher adds the power of *awe*, as bearing a message from above, and he appeals to the emotions of veneration and of fear.

Such being the mission of the preacher, the first question is, in what manner it should be performed; and it is manifest that, foremost of his accomplishments should be the faculty of moving—nay, of compelling even—his congregation to hearken to him. Let his discourse be ever so excellent, it will be wasted on the air unless he can keep the attention of his audience awake, and their minds, as well as their ears, wide open to receive it. Hence the first step towards pulpit oratory is a *good delivery*. Such is the charm of this that, as

very little experience will satisfy you, a bad sermon well delivered is really more effective than a good sermon badly delivered.

The rules for good delivery of a sermon are very nearly those already suggested for the right delivery of a speech. If it be read, it should be so read as to bear the slightest possible resemblance to reading: the eye should not be fixed steadily on the page, but continually look round upon the audience, as if each individual in the crowd were separately addressed. The eye, as you know, is always in advance of the voice, so as to render this diversion by no means difficult after a little practice, and it is facilitated much by keeping the left hand upon the page, with the finger pointing to the line, that the returning glance may alight instantly at the place where the sentence is to be regained. So by looking to the most distant part of the church the voice is unconsciously raised to the pitch necessary for filling the building, its success in this being at once indicated to the speaker by the echo of it—its failure by the dying away of the sound by degrees before it reaches its destination. Then the tones of the voice must be changed continually according to the character of the theme: now exultant, now sad; now commanding, now imploring; now deep in denunciation, now rich in loving kindness; imploring now, and now stern in warning. Above all things, a preacher should shun monotony, especially those dreariest forms of it, the pulpit drawl, the pulpit whine, the pulpit groan and the pulpit snivel.

The preacher should not stand like a talking automaton. Action is a necessary part of all oratory, only it should be appropriate to the place and the theme. The tub, in which it is the fashion of the Christian world to confine

their preachers, is certainly not favourable to action. It is difficult to be, or to appear, graceful of movement in such a position ; but the orator is not therefore to eschew action altogether. The eyes aid materially in riveting attention to the voice, as you will discover in a moment by trying to listen to a speaker whom you cannot see, and we like to witness upon the face and in the manner of those who address to us earnest words some evidence that they are as earnest as their language. Action is the natural expression of emotion, and the absence of it conveys the impression of want of earnestness in the speaker, that he does not feel what he is saying. If once that impression clouds the mind, there is an instant collapse of its own emotions. The action of the preacher is limited, of course. But he should turn continually from one part of his audience to another ; extend and wave and raise one arm, or both, according to the energy of his words, and fitly for their meaning : occasional bending of the head, and extending of the body over the pulpit in entreaty, or drawing it up to its full height in denunciation or warning, afford varieties of movement which, judiciously employed, are highly effective.

Such are a few brief hints for the *manner* in which a pulpit discourse should be delivered. I add some, equally brief, as to the *matter*.

A "text" is a custom too firmly established among us for the preacher to venture to dispense with it, although the modern sermon differs widely from the commentary that first introduced the practice of text-giving. But, if it is to be observed, now that the sermon is a discourse and not an exposition, the text should be chosen with some regard to fitness. A striking text attracts the

attention of the audience at the beginning, a good text assists his memory at the end, of the discourse; and, for objects so important as these, quaintness, and even conceits, may be excused—though they are not to be cultivated. The sermon itself should, like a speech, have a plan; the scheme of it should be capable of being sketched in a few lines, and the various parts should grow out of, and be proportioned to, one another, so as to make a harmonious whole. Unity is a great charm in all works of art; and a good sermon *is* a work of art—an exercise of the taste as well as of the intellect. Before a line is written, the entire of the plan should be set upon paper, and closely observed in the composition of the work. But the various divisions should not be exhibited to the audience by numbers, as is the custom with some preachers; it is unwise to alarm by a vista of possible tediousness, wearisome to contemplate. They should not be told that the subject will be divided into five heads, and each head into four parts, and such like. Let these appear, as you proceed, to grow naturally and properly out of the theme, and there will be no danger of tediousness, nor a dread of anticipated boredom. The discourse should have a definite aim—to maintain a proposition, to exhort to some duty, to warn against some sin. It should not be a vague declamation about religious matters in general, of which only a dim recollection can remain in the minds of the congregation, but a definite purpose, that might be distinctly comprehended and carried away to suggest meditation thereafter. The preacher should study variety by drawing largely for illustrations from nature, from art, from books; he should call to his aid the works of God and of man—the utterances of inspiration, and the inspirations of genius—to enforce his appeals. Nothing

is foreign to the true pulpit orator : he may do anything but *descend* ; he must not play the buffoon ; he must not jest ; he should not even provoke a smile, for this would be out of keeping with the place and the business of the assembly. It is permitted to him to be more flowery and poetical than other orators, but it is possible for him to err in excess of this species of ornament. His own good taste must guide him in that, for it is impossible to define the boundary by any rules. The conclusion should be a burst of eloquence, uttered with energy, and growing to a climax at the end, sending the hearers away excited and pleased. If the discourse has wandered somewhat in its progress, its close should be in strict accordance with its commencement and concentrate in a few burning words the substance of the theme, bringing back the thoughts of the hearers to the point whence they had started.

The language of a sermon addressed to a miscellaneous audience should be distinguished for simplicity. The preacher should adhere as closely as possible to the vernacular. Far better that he should be too homely than too fine. Educated and uneducated can alike understand his Saxon words ; the educated alone can understand his classical words. Even if he were compelled to choose between them, he should prefer to address himself to the poor, who cannot learn their duty from books, rather than to the educated, who can read better sermons than they are likely to hear.

I have thus hastily, and too briefly, noted the prominent features of pulpit oratory, because it was a necessary branch of the subject of these letters, half-a-dozen of which would have been demanded to enable me to do entire justice to the theme. But, as it has no direct

interest for you, and concerns you only as helping you to form a critical judgment of the preacher, I pass from it now to the other branches of the art of oratory, in all of which you will, I hope, possess a direct and powerful interest.

LETTER XL.

THE ORATORY OF THE SENATE.

THIS part of my subject, like the Oratory of the Pulpit, I will treat of briefly, although, to do it justice, several letters would be required. For the present, at least, it has but a secondary interest for you. I hope the time may come when it will require from you a profounder study.

The Oratory of the Senate may be parcelled into four distinct classes. A further subdivision might be suggested, and in a more elaborate treatise would be desirable; but four will suffice for our present purpose.

The first is the *Colloquial* style; the second, the *Business* style; the third, the *Oration*; the fourth, the *Reply*. This classification is derived from a review of the various objects sought by speakers in the Senate. In practice, few are equally successful in all; some excel in one or more and fail in the others; but your ambition should be, and your study should be directed, to do *all* well.

It is not commonly so thought, but there is a great deal to learn for mastering even the least of these accomplishments. Many zealous members of Parliament, ambitious for fame, have set themselves to the assiduous study of the Art of Oratory; but, by neglecting the apparently insignificant exercises of it, have failed to win the prize for which they have striven. They have toiled

hard to learn how to compose *a speech*, and how to speak it, and have neglected the less showy art of *talking* on a matter of business in a businesslike way. Inasmuch as this latter is required fifty times for once that an opportunity offers for an oration, they break down at the beginning of their careers, and acquire an ill repute as bores, which not even a good speech will afterwards suffice to remove.

By far the greater part of a senator's work is mere talk, conducted amid a Babel of tongues, and listened to by no ears but those of the reporters. This will appear to be extremely easy, until you try it. Then you will find that to stand up and just say what you have to say in the fewest words, and sit down when you have said it, is about the most difficult performance of a speaker. When you have trained yourself to do that well, you will have advanced far towards becoming an orator. Therefore to this you should sedulously direct your first endeavours.

The art of doing this is to do it without art. The common fault is an attempt to do it too well; picking words and turning sentences where these are not required, and indeed are out of place. The best rule for your guidance appears to me to be this:—forget that you are on your legs; suppose that you are sitting down and desire to make a communication to your neighbour on the other side of the table. As you would address him, so you should address “the House,” in those *conversational* dialogues that necessarily occupy so much of its time, and in which the greater portion of its actual business is transacted. You would not talk across the dinner-table in phrases or in formal sentences—that would be discouraging, not talking; and what can be more disagree-

able? Neither should you talk so in the House when it is in conversation. The best practice for educating yourself to this is to act the part in your study at home—sitting first, then standing, until you have schooled yourself not to change your manner with your position. If you still find the propensity adhering to you in your place in Parliament, do not be disheartened, but persevere; you will conquer at last, and you will know when you have conquered, by the wonderful ease of which you will be conscious as soon as you have learned to substitute sensible talking for misplaced speech-making.

The *Business Speech* is the next in frequency of demand. Its name describes generally its character. There is some work to be done, and the shortest way to the doing of it is the best. The British Parliament is essentially and substantially a place of business; the show days, the party fights, the speech-makings, are exceptional. An Oration upon a matter of business, however eloquent, would be properly deemed an impertinence, and perhaps the offender would be summarily put down by those who have come there for work and will not have their precious time wasted by abstractions. It is in committee that the business speech is most in requisition and most esteemed, and the reputation of a young member in the House will depend upon the success with which he performs this part of his senatorial duties.

The style of the *Business Speech* will be gathered from this statement of its objects. It should be a clear, straightforward, unadorned statement of facts and arguments. The purpose is not to excite passion or awaken sympathy, to command or to persuade—but to *convince* the sober judgment. Hence fine words, polished sen-

tences, and flights of eloquence are inadmissible. The words should not be wasted in formal introductions, but go at once to the point. Sedulously avoid committing to paper a single *sentence* you purpose to say. Arm yourself well with the *facts* and *figures*; have clearly in your mind the argument by which you apply them to "the question," and trust to your mother wit to express them in the *fittest* language—the fittest being not *the best*, but that which is most likely to be understood readily by your audience; and such are the words that come to us spontaneously whensoever we really have something to say.

But although you should on no account write even a sentence of a business speech—if you are about to cite figures, you should come well armed with them upon paper. Do not trust your memory with these, for it may prove treacherous at any moment, and throw you into utter confusion. Some small skill is required in so arraying figures that their results may be readily intelligible to your audience. Hence the necessity for the exercise of much forethought in the marshalling of your facts. This is study-work; it must be performed upon paper, with due deliberation, arranged and rearranged, until all is cast into the most convincing form.

A few words here as to the use and abuse of facts and figures in oratory.

The vast majority of persons love a fact and a sentiment, but loathe an argument, because all can comprehend the former and few can understand the latter. Minds that can reason a single step beyond the necessary requirements of existence are a small minority. A single fact seeming to confirm an opinion that has been taken upon trust weighs more with such minds than

a logical demonstration. In like manner, a sentiment is vehemently applauded, and accepted as if it were proof, by those who feel but cannot think. Facts and figures are essential ingredients in a business speech; but they require careful handling, for they are addressed to the reasoners as well as to those who cannot reason. The art of effectively manipulating facts and figures in a speech, where the audience have not time to grasp the details, as when they are read, consists in an elaborate and careful exposition of the *results*, for these will be readily apprehended and easily remembered, while the items are unheard or forgotten. If, for instance, your theme be Crime and Punishment; you show the operation of existing punishments upon crime by reference to the Judicial Statistics. To make your argument complete, it is necessary for you to state the items that compose the totals, for the reporter will need these for the satisfaction of your readers, although your audience cannot possibly follow the calculations with the speed of your utterance. You may therefore recite them briefly and rapidly. But what you desire to impress upon other minds is the result you deduce from them: you show that crime has or has not increased by a certain percentage, or in a certain ratio to the whole population, or in a certain direction; and such conclusions you should invariably put forward in the plainest language, with emphatic utterance, and even repeat them twice or thrice, to be assured that they are understood by all.

The Business Speech is one degree more formal than the conversational debate. It should be well planned, with attention to natural logic; and if the argument it contains is in any degree abstruse—nay, in any case—it is a prudent practice to wind up with a repetition of

the conclusions to which you have designed to conduct your hearers. Let the speech abound in illustration, but be sparing of ornament; your purpose is not to please, but to inform. They who choose to listen do so because the subject interests them; they have come for a certain work; they desire to perform it as speedily as possible, and they resent as a waste of time whatever does not contribute directly to the common object. The man who most readily commands a hearing in the House is not he who makes the finest speeches, but he who speaks sensibly on subjects on which he is well informed. Hence it is that many men have a good reputation *in* the House, and no fame out of it, and are heard there with respectful silence, although wanting in every grace of oratory. The best training for the Business Speech is frequent practice of the Colloquial Speech, already described; and the best field for its exercise, especially for the beginner, is in Committee of the whole House upon Bills, when the attendance is usually thin, the opportunity for rising frequent, and no criticism is to be feared.

The third division of the Oratory of the Senate is that of *the Oration*, properly so called—the set speech on a set subject, after formal notice, with time for preparation, when the speaker is expected to be prepared. The great occasions for these grand exercises are the bringing forward of a motion on a subject of high importance, or asking for leave to bring in a Bill affecting weighty interests. The initiative being then with you, it is your business to put the House in possession of the entire of the case—the facts, the arguments, the conclusions you deduce from them. In such an enterprise every resource of your art is open to you—nay, is required of you. You may appeal to the passions, to the sympathies, to the

sentiments, to the reason, of your hearers ; you may strive to convince or to persuade, to win or to warn. You cannot be too eloquent, provided it be true eloquence. Your discourse should be a composition constructed with consummate art, on a definite plan, complete in all its parts and perfect as a whole. The hints that have been submitted to you in the preceding letters will here be called into requisition—alike as to the structure of the speech, its composition, its ornaments, and its utterance. I need not, therefore, now repeat them. Suffice it to say, that it should be carefully prepared, not in actual wording, but in thought. Commit the plan to paper, but only the plan. Sketch in tabular array your course of argument, so arranged that the eye may catch in a moment the suggestion at any part where your memory may have failed you. If there are figures, or a quotation, set them out in full at their proper places. But write no more than this, unless it be the peroration, which high authorities have recommended, both by precept and example, as a proper subject for utterance from the memory. I am not quite satisfied that they are right. I doubt whether the transition from the language of extempore speaking to the very different structure of a written composition is not so manifest as to jar upon the ear and offend the taste. On the other hand, I admit the necessity for a striking close to a good speech, and that its effect is much heightened by rising gradually to a climax of thought and language. I acknowledge the extreme difficulty of accomplishing this by a single effort of the mind, without correction or choice of expressions. At all events, only great genius or intense emotion can extemporise such bursts of eloquence, and it will be safer for average men to

prepare their perorations, writing them, correcting them, elaborating them, until they satisfy the taste of the author. But inasmuch as it is very difficult for any man to form a correct judgment of his own recent compositions, it would be desirable, if practicable, to call to your aid a judicious friend, and submit the work to his criticism and correction, before it is finally adopted and committed to the memory.

More than this I cannot recommend you to attempt, for I have witnessed the most painful failures from adoption of the advice given by some writers on oratory, that you should compose and commit to memory certain passages in your speech, to be introduced at points that afford opportunities for a flourish. The transition from the extempore to the written passages is manifest to the audience, and mars the unity of the work. The interpolated paragraphs rarely fit into the places into which they are thrust; they are almost certain to be out of keeping with that which preceded or with that which follows. Even if the ideas should harmonise, the construction of the sentences and the language are sure not to do so. And not only the matter, but the manner, undergoes an awkward change. The very tone of the voice and aspect of the countenance are different when you speak from the mind or from the memory. This is unpleasantly apparent to the least critical of your audience. Then the balder and tamer parts of your discourse appear doubly bald and tame after the flowers and the fume of the eloquence that had gone before. Last of all, but not least, in its dangers is the possibility, nay, the probability, of the memory proving treacherous. If there is the slightest slip, all is gone; the thread once lost is never regained. You beat about with evident effort,

looking as bewildered as you feel; you try back, talk nonsense, and at length fairly break down, utterly discomfited. Of course, the more of these written passages you try to introduce, the more you multiply the chances of this most ignominious form of failure.

Lastly, there is the *Reply*. This is the triumph of speech-making, if not of oratory. A great *oration* may be best made in the introduction of a subject; but a great *speech* in a reply. This it is that tests the true genius of an orator. By labour or preparation it is possible for mediocrity to get up a formal oration that may truly deserve admiration as a work of art. But a reply cannot be got up; in its nature it must be *impromptu*, and for its efficiency it must depend entirely upon the natural powers of the orator. If you observe closely the various speakers in Parliament, you will note how some who are accounted orators, and who make fine speeches, never commit themselves to a reply, while all the greatest intellects there reserve themselves for the reply. Here it is that the orator revels in the full enjoyment of all his faculties and the unrestricted exercise of his art. He is bound by no rules of construction, he has not to search for subjects, usually he is embarrassed only by the wealth of them, for whatever has been mooted in the debate is his to deal with at his pleasure. He has taken note of the weak points in the argument, and, with these before him, he treats them in their order, with the further consciousness that his is the last word, and therefore that he has the advantage of the last impression upon the minds of the audience. For a task so all-embracing and miscellaneous, no rules can be prescribed, for it is not subject to rule, and no hints can be suggested, for the

moment must teach its own lesson. I can only say that you will best educate yourself to the Reply by sedulous study of the Arts of Writing, Reading, and Speaking, and the hints I have thrown out to this end may help you to attain the object of your ambition.

LETTER XLI.

THE ORATORY OF THE BAR.

THAT Bar oratory has a style of its own is evident from this, that, with rare exceptions, great orators of the Bar are not equally successful in the Legislature and some are conspicuous failures. Probably this is due in part to the prejudice with which the speeches of Lawyers are received in the House of Commons. They are looked upon, with what justice I will not venture to affirm or deny, as place-hunters rather than patriots; as advocates speaking from a brief, more than as men pleading the cause which in their honest consciences they believe to be the truth and the right. If they speak well, they obtain little credit, for it is thought to be their business to speak; and if they speak indifferently, they are laughed at as men who do not know their business. A foregone conclusion thus taints the judgment. To achieve success, far greater ability and sagacity must be displayed by the Lawyer in the Legislature than would suffice to conduct a layman to fame and influence.

But, if you would prosper at the Bar, you must not suffer your aspirations after parliamentary honours to divert your studies for a moment from the arts by which the success of the Advocate is to be achieved. In this, as in all its other departments, the Law is a jealous mistress, and you must serve her with all your soul and all your strength. She will not endure a divided allegiance, nor

permit you to win other fame than that which she confers. If you resolve to make the Bar your *business*, as well as your *profession*, you will probably have to *unlearn* much, as certainly you will require to learn a great deal. If you have cultivated oratory at Oxford, or Cambridge, or at any of the spouting clubs in London, almost surely you will have acquired a style of speaking altogether unfitted for the Bar, and which you must discard with all possible speed, without hesitation and without reserve. The debating-club style is the worst you can bring into a court of justice, and exposes its exhibitor to certain humiliation and failure. It is the most fruitful cause of breaking down at the Bar, and when you see it still adhering to a man after six months of trial, you may look upon him as hopeless. Being thus fatal, your first and most earnest endeavours should be directed to learn if any trace of this style cleaves to you, and if it be found, you should strive laboriously to cast it off.

You will not better know yourself in this than in more important matters. Consult, therefore, a judicious friend, or, if you have none, seek the counsel of a professional teacher of elocution. Prefer a friend, if he can be found, for his ears are likely to be more true than those of masters, who are themselves apt to fall into mannerisms almost as disagreeable as the faults they are invited to mend. Give your friend an opportunity to hear you speak at some time when you are to do so in earnest; for a private recitation, made with express purpose to avoid a defect, would not be a sufficient test. If he should detect the slightest traces of the debating-club style—which I cannot describe, although you will recognise it in a moment—you should direct your efforts to its removal. Its principal features are grandiloquence, floweriness,

phrase-making, poetising, word-picking and mouthing—all or some of them. To banish these, you must rather go to their opposites, and learn, by frequent practice, to speak with exceeding plainness and simplicity, clothing your thoughts in the common language of every-day life, and putting your sentences into the most un-essay-like form; in brief, bring down your *oratory* to *talking*, and from that basis start afresh, omitting no opportunity for practice, and, when practising, ever bearing in mind that your present object is to *unlearn*.

Having shifted more or less those evil habits, and become again a pupil, accept a few hints as to what it will be necessary for you to *learn*.

In studying the art of oratory for the Bar, you must, in the first place, keep clearly before you the objects of it. Unlike most of the other forms of oratory, it is not a display of yourself—with the acquisition of fame as the primary purpose—but it is a duty which you have undertaken for the benefit of another, and your single thought should be—as I believe with most of us it *is*—the advantage of your client. Whatever will best promote his interests you are bound to do, without a thought of display on your own part. The cause of your client is advanced only by persuading the jury and convincing the court. Therefore your business is to adopt precisely that style of speaking which will best persuade jurymen and convince judges, and this is not a style that finds favour in the debating club or in the House of Commons.

Of each separately.

JURIES differ much in character, not merely in the various counties, in commercial and rural districts, in London and in the provinces, but even in the same locality, at the same assizes or sittings; and, therefore,

your first care should be to study the character of your jury. I am referring now to the common jury; the special jury will be separately considered hereafter.

If you have accustomed yourself to read the character in the face, you will probably make a shrewd guess of your men at a glance. But it must be confessed that the countenance sometimes deceives, and we are often surprised to find a sound judgment under a stolid front and an intelligent aspect concealing a shallow mind. Your eye will give you a reading that will prove tolerably correct; do not, however, rest upon that alone, but watch closely the twelve heads, when the case is launched, and especially when the witnesses are under examination. Then you will certainly discover who are the intelligent, who the impotent, who the sagacious, who the shallow, who the facile, who the obstinate. Knowing them, you know how to deal with them; you know who will lead the others, and therefore to whom you are mainly to address yourself; you learn whom you must endeavour to convince, whom to persuade, whom to bend to your will, and you must mould *your* speech to the measure of *their* capacities.

In the first place, it is essential that all of them should, if possible, understand what you are saying to them, and, as in a team the slowest horse regulates the pace, so must you address yourself to the comprehension of the lowest intelligence among the twelve, and I need not say that with a common jury this is too often very low indeed. But do not mistake my meaning in this. When I tell you that you must speak for the ignorant, I do not contemplate vulgar thoughts, or lowlife phrases, but your own ideas put into plain language, and enforced by familiar illustrations. The besetting sin of Advocates is

that of talking over the heads of their juries—addressing to them words that are as strange to their ears, and therefore as unintelligible to their minds, as any foreign tongue, and in throwing before them ideas comprehensible only to the cultivated intellect. I am perfectly conscious of the extreme difficulty of avoiding this error; how hard it is even to recognise the fact, that thoughts and words, which habit has made familiar to you, are unintelligible to minds that have not enjoyed your training; how still more formidable is the task of translating, as you speak, the fine words that come naturally to your lips into the homely vernacular of the classes from whom the common juries are taken. But this is your business, and to this you must train yourself at any cost of time and labour, for it is a condition of success at the Common Law Bar, that will be excused only in rare and exceptional cases of extraordinary capacities securing sufficient business of the class that is addressed to Special Juries or to the Judge.

You will soon learn to know if you are making yourself to be understood by your jury, holding not their ears only, but their minds. It is difficult to describe the signs of this: a certain steady gaze of attention and fixedness of feature, and commonly a slight bending forward of the head, are the usual outward manifestations. But more sure than these is that secret sympathy which exists between minds with whom a communication is established. You *feel* that you are listened to and understood, just as you are painfully conscious when your audience are not heeding, though they be ever so silent and still. Keep your eyes upon the jurymen while you address them, for the eye is often as attractive as the tongue; watch them well, and, if you mark any that do not seem to listen, fix

your eyes upon them, and you will talk to them, and they will feel as if you were addressing them individually, and open their ears accordingly. If they put on a puzzled look at any time, you may be sure that your argument is too subtle for them, or your language too fine : be warned ; simplify your argument ; introduce some homely illustration ; win them to a laugh ; repeat in other forms and phrases the substance of what you have wasted in unintelligible sentences. Above all, if you see them growing weary, restless in their seats, averting their eyes, yawning, looking at their watches, and other symptoms of having heard enough, accept the warning and bring your speech to a close, even if you may not have said all that you designed to say. When your jury has come to this pass, continued attempts to attract their attention are not merely failures in themselves, but they mar the good effect of that which has gone before. Come to a hasty or even to an abrupt conclusion and resume your seat. The *art of sitting down* is quite as useful at the Bar as in the other arenas of the orator.

The style of an address to a jury is peculiar. A formal speech is rarely required, and when not required, it is altogether out of place and unpleasing. It argues bad taste as well as an unsound judgment, and is sure to be visited by a shower of ridicule. The occasions that call for *oratory* at the Bar are very rare, and when they offer you should not neglect them ; but it is a mistake to suppose that, when they are turned to good account and a flourish has been made, success is achieved. It is not the orator, but the *talker*, who wins fame and fortune nowadays as an Advocate. A tendency to speechifying is rather a hindrance than a help in our courts, where there are a hundred commonplace disputes, in which it

would be ludicrous to attempt eloquence, for one great case in which oratory is looked for. Imagine, if you can, a rhapsody in a running-down case, or a grand peroration in an action for goods sold.

Remember this, that you may win renown and fortune at the Bar without the capacity to make a speech; but you will certainly fail, though great in oratory, if you do nothing more than spout. Strive to accomplish both, and to know the fit occasions for each; but educate yourself to *talk* well, as your chiefest need.

An oration at the Bar does not differ much in its construction from an oration elsewhere. The rules I have already suggested for oratory generally are equally applicable to this form of it, and to them you should refer for further instructions.

Our present concern is with the ordinary business of an Advocate in the civil courts before a common jury. The examination and cross-examination of witnesses do not properly belong to the subject of these letters; and as I have already treated them at some length in *The Advocate*, I pass them by now, and invite you at once to the consideration of the address to the Jury.

Light, lively, pleasant talk is the most effective. Do not speak *at* them or *to* them, but *with* them. Lord Abinger used to say that his great success as an advocate was due to his making himself the thirteenth jurymen. There could not be a better illustration of the manner of dealing with juries. Therefore take a little trouble at first to put yourself on good terms with your jury—not by flattering language, but by that more effective flattery which is *shown*, not said. If you meet a man in the street, and want to convince or to persuade him, how do you proceed? You take him by the button, you appeal to his intelli-

gence, you explain the matter to him in the most familiar terms and with the most homely illustrations, and you do not let him go till you have made him understand you. Twelve jurymen are only a multiplication of such cases, to be treated in the same manner.

Good temper goes a great way towards conciliating a jury. Command yourself; win with smiles; frowns repel them. Exhibit unflinching confidence in your cause, for any distrust betrayed by you is instantly imparted to them. If the subject is dry, enliven it with some timely jest, and the duller the theme the smaller the joke that suffices to relieve its dulness. Throw before them as much *fact* and as little *argument* as possible; you are not so likely to convince as to persuade. When you think what sort of minds you are seeking to sway, how entirely incompetent they are to follow an argument, you must make the most of *facts*, treating your audience as children, who are never tired of listening to that which paints a picture upon their minds, or evokes a sentiment, but whom abstractions and logic send to sleep. The majority of any common jury are in this respect only children. You may make them "see it," you may make them "feel it;" but I defy you to lead them, by the cleverest and closest argument, to be convinced, as a cultivated thinker is convinced.

Make large use of illustrations; they will be readily accepted as substitutes for argument, and often, I am sorry to say, for facts. But you must not travel for them beyond the circle with which your jurymen are familiar. You will not throw light on one obscurity by comparing it with another. Refer to their own knowledge and experience whenever you can, and make your client's case their own, if the slightest chance opens to you.

LETTER XLII.

THE ORATORY OF THE BAR (CONTINUED).

It has been often to me a matter for regret that lawyers are excepted from liability to serve on juries. I am sure that to all of us who aspire to be advocates there could be nothing more instructive than to act as a jurymen occasionally. When I have seen the twelve heads laid together in debate upon the verdict, I have felt the most eager curiosity to learn what view each one had taken of the case, and by what process the twelve men arrived at their unanimous decision. I have thought that, if I could but be among them through a dozen trials, to witness what most moved each, to what extent some were governed by others, and how the unavoidable conflict of opinion was conducted and finally closed, I should possess a knowledge that would be of inestimable value to me in dealing with other juries whom it was my business to persuade. That source of knowledge has, however, by the policy of the law, been closed against us, and we can only guess what goes on in a jury box from the verdicts that we hear, and slight intimations occasionally given by a question or a look.

But although it has never been my good fortune to sit upon a jury, an intelligent friend of mine, who is not a lawyer, was compelled lately to serve at the sittings of one of the courts at Westminster. I was curious to learn what were the results of the experience

thus obtained. It was a common jury, but many of its members were men of somewhat superior intelligence and respectability—in intellect far above the average of country juries.

His report of them is startling. He tells me that the most striking characteristic he discovered on the very first day of his attendance (and it was confirmed by subsequent experience) was the hastiness with which they formed an opinion of a case. The opening for the plaintiff, when clearly and plausibly stated by a counsel whose manner pleased them, almost invariably so prejudiced their minds in the plaintiff's favour, that only the strongest case on the part of the defendant sufficed to disturb the judgment thus prematurely formed. He says that the speech always weighed with them much more than the evidence, and that, as a rule, they accepted the statement of the case by counsel as the very fact, without waiting to see if it was sustained by proof; and even though the proofs failed, the connected story that had been first conveyed to their minds was rarely permitted to be disturbed by contradictions or failure in evidence;—as if they had not the power of comparison, or were reluctant that their clear conceptions of the case should be disturbed by difficulties which they wanted the wit to solve.

My own impression had been that juries were very little led by the speeches of Counsel, but very much by the summing-up of the Judge. I was surprised to learn that, according to my friend's experience, it is otherwise. His juries, he said, appeared to be more led by the Counsel than by the Judge. The weariness of a day in the jury-box was relieved by the speeches. They were heard because they were amusing, when, perhaps, a great

deal of the evidence had scarcely entered at the ear and had never reached the mind. Many of his fellows paid no attention whatever to the evidence, as if they felt themselves incompetent to weigh its worth and extract the truth from it, and they seemed to rely upon the speeches of Counsel for all their information, unconscious that these distorted some parts of the case and suppressed others. The Judge's summing-up carried very little weight indeed with them. In almost every case their minds were made up before the trial had reached this last stage ; and unless the Judge explained to them some question of law, they gave small heed to his impartial representation of the facts as proved.

Then, he says, the prejudices were enormous and the bias they occasioned was frightful. The justice of a case was the very last consideration ; if any other existed, the preference was given to it. If one of the parties had a friend or a friend's friend in the jury-box, that influence was perceptible at once. If the subject-matter was one in which even a few of the jurymen were concerned, as similarity of trade, or consciousness of being open to the same complaint, the verdict was certain. The majority being tradesmen, it was useless to dispute a tradesman's bill, or the amount of his charges. A Company had no chance with them, whatever the merits of its defence. If it was objected, by the more intelligent and fair-minded, that the right was with the defendant, it was always answered that a Company could afford to pay, but a verdict against the poor plaintiff would ruin him. When a difference arose about the verdict, he found that, among the twelve were always some whose minds were not to be moved by any argument or remonstrance : such was their opinion, and they would

not listen to the views of their colleagues ; and frequently, though a minority, they succeeded, by simple persistency, in bringing the more yielding round to their own side and thus carrying the verdict.

Always many of the jury were stupid men, utterly incompetent to form a judgment upon the questions submitted to them, and led by the first statement of the case for the plaintiff ; or, if that was beyond their comprehension, by the leaning of the Judge ; or, if that was too difficult for their understandings, they simply acquiesced in whatever the more intelligent among them dictated, unless it ran counter to a prejudice or a partiality, for these always carried the day against counsel, judge, justice, reason, and their fellows.

When such is the experience of London juries, which are certainly far above the average in intelligence, it may be well imagined what sort of justice is dispensed at the assizes, where the average intelligence is immensely lower, and you will now cease to wonder why the suitors in the County Courts, where a jury is optional and not compulsory, shun it so eagerly that it is demanded only in one case in nine hundred, and then by a suitor who is conscious that his case is a bad one, and whose only chance lies in the *injustice* of a jury. It is there observed that, whenever a man is conscious that he has a good case, he prefers that it should be tried by the Judge alone.

The general result of my friend's experience was thus stated to me :—" From what I have seen of juries, I should be sorry to commit to them any matter in which I was interested, and when satisfied that I had right on my side. Knowing what I now know, I would make large sacrifices and submit to much extortion, rather than trust myself to that which I had been accus-

tomed to look upon as 'the palladium of British justice'—until I had taken part in it."

The general unfitness of the jury system for the trial of civil suits will probably not be unknown to you, for you could not have sat as a disinterested spectator in a *Nisi Prius* court for a week without learning *that* lesson. But the directions which that unfitness takes will doubtless be as new to you as they certainly were to me. I was not prepared for the extraordinary value of the opening statement of the plaintiff's case, nor for the comparatively small regard paid to the summing-up of the Judge. Somehow I had assumed, without reflection, that the Judge's influence would be decisive, not merely on account of his position, but because his is the last word addressed to the Jury. Knowing now what is the fact, I can see reasons for it that had never occurred to me. The mind that is unaccustomed to reflect, to compare and to judge, is moved mainly by *the facts* presented to it; the story that is first told is first written upon it; when a conflicting story is afterwards told, it is rejected, because the mind wants the capacity to go through the process of comparing, judging, and extracting the truth from the opposing statements, and therefore it gladly takes refuge in adherence to the narrative first addressed to it, and thus escapes the bewilderment caused by having the ears opened to both sides.

But whether this solution be right or wrong, the fact remains, and the lesson to be learned from it is, that the opening speech is of far greater moment than Advocates have deemed it to be; and that you should study this portion of your practice with more care than is commonly given to it. Your aim should be to state your case so clearly that, as presented by you, it shall carry conviction

with it to those minds—and they are usually the majority—in the jury-box which, being unable to entertain two ideas at once, and incompetent to compare or to reason, are satisfied to be thus easily filled, and refuse to be puzzled by the contradictions, too subtle for their comprehensions, that are afterwards presented to them.

A Special Jury is, of course, less subject to these disturbing influences. But precisely in proportion to its intelligence does the probability of differences increase. Twelve men who are competent to form an independent judgment, and who desire to discharge their duty faithfully according to the dictates of their consciences, are not likely to take the same views of questions upon which the most astute lawyers have found such differences that they have counselled the parties to contest them in a court of law. To require the unanimity of twelve sensible men upon doubtful questions is so absurd, because so impossible, that one is amazed such an attempt should ever have been made, and ashamed that it has not been abandoned long ago. Nor could it have been persisted in for twenty years, but for the necessary addition of a detestable tyranny to an irrational folly. So long as the law consistently sought to compel an apparent unanimity, by the torture of imprisonment in cold and hunger, the unreflecting public presumed that the machine they had been taught to venerate worked as well as sentimentalists asserted. But no sooner had unanimity ceased to be compelled by torture than the truth appeared. Juries, in rapidly increasing numbers, were discharged without a verdict, by reason of hopeless disagreements.

Therefore, in dealing with a Special Jury, you have two aims: first, to win the verdict, if you can; and failing that, to produce such a difference of opinion as may lead to their discharge without a verdict. In

addressing a Special Jury, you should assume a tone and manner and form of speech different from those with which you talk to a Common Jury. You should raise yourself to them : you may venture upon argument ; you may use choicer language, without fear of speaking “ over their heads ;” you may appeal to many motives that would be unfelt by a Common Jury. But a Special Jury is not without prejudices of its own—class prejudices which your own instincts ought to tell you to avoid, or to enlist on your side, as the need may be. It will be unnecessary to resort to the repetitions that are essential where it is your task to beat ideas into minds slow, because unaccustomed, to thought ; the same arts are not required to fix their attention.

The style best adapted for a Special Jury is indicated by your office. You are a gentleman, talking to gentlemen who are your equals in position, and therefore it should be free without being familiar, and deferential without humility. You have the advantage in this, that you have something to tell them which you know, and it is your business to impart your knowledge to them ; but, also, they are to be your judges, and therefore you treat them as men whose goodwill you are desirous to conciliate.

And, with all Juries, whether special or common, remember the precept I have already urged upon you ; do not weary them by saying too much ; but, even if you have more to say, on the instant you perceive the first unmistakable symptoms of weariness in your audience, bring your speech to a close and sit down ; for, from that moment, you are not merely wasting the best argument and the most artistic eloquence—you are undoing whatever advantage you may have gained before, and every sentence is a step backwards from victory.

LETTER XLIII.

THE ORATORY OF THE BAR (CONCLUDED).

WHEN you address the Court, you should adopt a style, a manner, and a tone different from those with which you address a Jury, whether special or common. When speaking to a Jury, you deal with men not learned in the law, for the most part not well accustomed to the mental work of rapidly following a compact argument. Alike with a Special and a Common Jury, it is necessary to elaborate your argument, that they may keep pace with it, and to repeat it, or the more important part of it, even twice or thrice, for assurance that the slowest mind among the twelve shall have taken hold of it. But when you address the Court you appeal to intelligence greater than your own, to a mind or minds practised in argument, trained to its pursuit, comprehending instantly the meaning of every word you use, and the more technical your talk the more intelligible it is to the listeners. Therefore you need none of the arts required to win the ears of a Jury. You should condense your thoughts and language, devoting your entire attention to the logical array of your argument, and the *precision* with which you present it. The graces of oratory, such as voice and manner can impart, are never useless, nor to be despised in any kind of speaking, and they are not to be disregarded even in addressing the Court; but they are by no means necessary to a successful

effort. The attention of the Judge is directed more to your argument than to you—to your matter rather than to your manner; and, provided that the argument you have constructed be sound and sensible, it will be heard and accepted, although conveyed in broken sentences and inelegant language. Hesitating speech to a Jury is worse than fluent feebleness, because it is mistaken for incapacity; but, by the Court, fluency and hesitation are alike disregarded, and the speaker is measured more by his mind than by his lips. Do not, therefore, lose courage if you lack expression for your logic; provided only that you have in your own mind the clear construction of an argument, you may safely trust to your audience to seize it, howsoever ungainly the manner in which you bring it forth.

But then it is difficult to discover if you have in your mind a perfectly reasoned argument. In fact, the mind is very apt, unconsciously to itself, to adopt a summary process of reasoning and to arrive at a conclusion by jumps, instead of by steps. When in a merely contemplative argument we arrive at a difficulty, the mind is liable to pass on one side of it, or to leap over it, instead of threading its way through it, and often the fault is not found until the thoughts take shape in words. The surest way to avoid this not uncommon discomfiture is to set down your argument upon paper—(not the very words to be used, but only an outline of it)—in the order in which you design to place it before the Court. This skeleton of the discourse will serve the double purpose of enabling you to detect any defects or fallacies not seen when it existed only in contemplation, and of keeping you strictly to the point when you are presenting it to the Court. In this summary be careful to separate the

several parts of the argument, so that they may be readily caught by the eye, for when you are hurried and flurried by action, a written page is merely a confused mass to your glance, unless the sentences are marked by very obvious divisions. Although you would not habitually resort to the preacher's practice of announcing the divisions of the discourse to the audience, with the formidable figures that advise them of the task that is before them, it is necessary that you should so state the divisions on your note, for your own guidance. These divisions should be written from the outer margin, and the subdivisions should be written within a second margin, and the cases you propose to cite by way of illustration should be noted within a third margin. The effect of this arrangement is, that at any moment a glance will inform you what you have said, what more you have to say, and in what order you should say it.

In putting your argument, your manner should be deferential and your language suggestive. Nothing but consummate ability and unquestioned profundity of legal knowledge excuses a dogmatic style of address. It has been endured by, and even commanded respect from, the Bench; but it was accompanied by personal dislike and no junior could adopt it with impunity. Diffidence, even if it take the form of confusion of speech, is sure to receive kindly encouragement from the Judges, and you could not desire a more generous audience.

Do not, however, think that I design to assert that manner is unimportant in addressing a Judge. Everywhere, and always, it is of moment. A Judge will hear you, and try to understand you, however badly you may express yourself; but he will listen more readily, and

your argument will be more effective, because more certainly understood, if it be couched in good language and uttered with some of the graces of an orator. Even though you may determine never to address a Jury, you should not the less fit yourself to speak in a pleasing strain to the Judges, whether in the Equity Courts or elsewhere.

So, when you address *Magistrates* at Quarter Sessions, carefully avoid the too frequent fault of talking to them as to a Jury. True that they are the judges both of the fact and of the law, and to that extent perform the office of jurymen; but then they are a very special jury, and are not swayed by the clap-trap and fallacies that are commonly used by advocates to influence juries. On this point I speak from some experience, and I can tell you that many a time I have seen the utmost impatience upon the Bench of eloquent speeches addressed to the Justices that would have secured a verdict with a Jury. Educated men, sitting as judges, even though they may not be lawyers, desire facts and arguments, and look upon anything more than these, and especially upon complimentary language, sentimentalities and fine phrases, as rather an insult to their understandings. If these last have any effect at all, it is only to weary or to repel.

It is often asked, how far jesting is permissible at the Bar. It is not in good taste, perhaps, but I must admit that it is very effective. When the most grave work is being done men feel the strongest tendency to laugh. It is wonderful what slight and sorry jests will provoke shouts of laughter in a court of justice. I will not now consider the cause of this, though the philosophy of humour accounts for it. The fact suffices, that when

surrounded by solemnity we are most easily tickled to laughter. The Advocate who can summon smiles to the lips of his audience will command their ears more certainly than he who can only call tears into their eyes, and both will achieve an easy triumph over the speaker who can do neither, let him be ever so accomplished in other respects. If, therefore, jesting secures the object of the orator, which is in the first place to procure an attentive hearing, a moderate use of it *is* permissible. But the danger of the practice lies in the difficulty of observing moderation. The habit grows with indulgence; a successful jest to-day will provoke two to-morrow, and when the joke comes to the lips, it is almost impossible to suppress the utterance of it. The conclusion is, that you *may* jest, with due discretion both as to quality and quantity; but, conscious of the tendency of the practice to degenerate, keep a watch over yourself, to restrain the impulse when it comes out of place.

I have said that, in the vast majority of cases, you must not *speechify* to your juries, but only *talk* to them, especially at *Nisi Prius*. Eloquence would be worse than useless over a disputed account or a questionable contract—it would be positively ridiculous. The more simple, straightforward, and business-like your speech, the more influence it will carry. It should be plain to homeliness in its language, and entirely unoratorical in manner. You are to *discuss* with the twelve men before you a matter of business—nothing more; and you address them precisely as you would were you to stop any one of them in the street, and talk over with him “that little affair.” I can give you no better illustration of my meaning.

Sometimes, though rarely, the occasion will arise when

it will be your duty to appeal to the *feelings* of your Jury. Then do it thoroughly. Throw your whole *heart* into the work. Do not halt half-way; do not fear that you will go too far; I never yet saw a speaker fail from excess of emotion, but I have seen many fail from lack of it. If it becomes your business to appeal to the feelings at all, there is scarcely a limit to the sweep of the chords; all may be pressed into your service to produce the one tone it is your purpose to evoke. But remember—and I repeat the rule yet once again, for it is the golden one that lies at the foundation of the art of oratory—effectually to kindle the emotions of others you must yourself be moved; to make them feel you must feel; a mere acted part will not answer. Sympathy is the secret string by which the emotions are awakened, and there is no sympathy with a sham, however well disguised and cleverly acted.

LETTER XLIV.

THE ORATORY OF THE PLATFORM.

I CLASS under this general title all the various speakings that are addressed to the public at large, on matters of public concern, and as distinguished from those addressed to selected persons to whom you speak as a citizen, and not in a professional capacity. The distinction, which is of some importance, will be recognised at once by the instance of a Member of Parliament. When he addresses his constituents, seeking for election, his oratory is that of *the platform*. When, being elected, he addresses the House of Commons, he speaks in his professional character as an M.P., and the strain of his oratory will be that which I have endeavoured to describe in the letter that treats of the Oratory of the Senate.

The *Oratory of the Platform* has some characteristics common to all times, places and assemblies, and which are essential to the successful practice of it. But, in addition to these universal features, certain special qualities are required for various kinds of platform speaking, according to the various natures of the occasion, the subject, and the audience. I will first endeavour to give you a brief sketch of the general characteristics which you should study to comprehend, and then I will suggest what has appeared to me to be the special characteristics of some of the most important kinds of platform oratory.

A public meeting is moved by two great levers, one of which is supplied by the speaker, the other by the audience. You stir the people by your voice and words, but enthusiasm is supplied by themselves, caught by one from another and reflected again and again from mind to mind. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the most accomplished orator, talking to a single man, or even to half-a-dozen men, to stir their hearts to tumult or inspire a fit of uncontrollable passion. There is wanting the silent sympathy by which mind communicates with mind, as if by the subtle influence of some undiscovered medium by whose agency the impressions of one mind are inaudibly and invisibly impressed upon all other minds within its sphere. The phenomena of panics and of popular frenzies and delusions place beyond question the fact of the existence of such a sympathy, and the orator must avail himself of it upon the platform, if he would put forth the full power of his art.

True, this sympathy is never kindled by argument alone. The most perfect logician the world has ever seen would fail to awaken the feelings of his audience, even while commanding their loftiest admiration and securing their heartiest applause, for the skill with which his reason has addressed itself to their intelligence. The better minds among the audience may be held in willing thraldrom by a clear and convincing argument; and, if that alone be the object of the orator, he may be proud of his success; but the minds so to be won are few among the many—the multitude must be moved by more stimulating appeals: argument fails because ordinary minds cannot understand it; the *feelings* alone are common to all humanity, and through the feelings alone, therefore, can mixed assemblies be commanded.

To secure the sympathies of an audience, it is in the first place necessary that you should be at one with them. The process is not wholly on your part. The most eloquent speaker cannot move an assembly entirely at his own pleasure—there must be some predisposition on the part of the listeners to sympathise with him; they must meet him, as it were, half-way. Consequently he is compelled to consult their prejudices. Let him run counter to these and his influence is gone. It has been said, indeed, of speakers, as of writers, who court *popularity*, that they can achieve it only by expressing in more apt words than the listener can employ the emotions already lurking in the minds of those whom they address; that, in fact, the orator does but fire the train that has been previously laid. A brief experience will satisfy you how true is this. The lesson to be learned from it is, that to succeed upon the platform, you should, as a rule, shun argument in its own shape, though sometimes you may venture it, if cleverly disguised. But, inasmuch as a speech cannot be all declamation, and you must appear to aim at convincing even when you are only persuading, there is a resource always readily accepted as a substitute for argument—narrative, simile, and type. If, for instance, you wish that a certain proposition should be accepted as truth; should you proceed to prove it by *an argument* you would send half your audience to sleep, or throw them into a state of uneasy bewilderment. But tell them an anecdote that carries with it the desired conclusion, or typify the teaching, or introduce a striking simile, and eyes and mouths will open, and the comparison or the incident will be accepted with unquestioning readiness, however illogical the process, and however unsatisfactory the reasoning.

It is a great art, in platform oratory, to have a nice and rapid perception of the temper of your audience, and coolness and courage to retreat when you find yourself treading on dangerous ground. A keen eye will tell you in a moment if you are going too far; nay, by a kind of instinct, you will *feel* the shadow that is passing over the minds of the assembly, and if you are wise, you will withdraw as gracefully as you can. I am unable to describe the aspect that indicates this incipient repulsion; but you are conscious of a sudden shadow upon the upturned faces, and a chill that comes over yourself and freezes your energies. The best antidote to this, and the surest cover for your retreat, is a joke, if you can penetrate one at such a moment; a laugh is a certain restorative to good humour, and the folly will be forgotten in the fun.

Your manner upon the platform should be *deferential*. A mixed audience is far more self-important and tetchy than a select party of the educated and intelligent. The more nearly an assembly resembles a mob, the more exacting it is of professions of respect. All the famous mob orators whom I have heard appeared to me to owe much of their power to the extreme deference they exhibited towards the people before them. King Mob feels an affront—and resents it, too—as readily as any other potentate. But you may take it as a maxim that an audience, whatever its composition, is more easily *won* than *commanded*.

Another quality, essential to success upon the platform, is good humour, and good temper must be combined with it. You know the difference between them. *Good humour* is the foundation of geniality; it is the habitual condition of a mind that looks on the sunny side of

things, a kindly disposition, a cheerful temperament, an inclination to be rather blind to faults and very discerning of virtues. *Good humour* is near of kin to good nature, though not identical with it. Its presence is always written upon the countenance and bespeaks favour for the Orator before a word passes his lips. *Good temper* is not exhibited until the occasion calls for it and then it is a quality of the highest value. In all mixed assemblies of a public character, especially in political gatherings, opposition is tolerably certain to appear in some shape, often in forms calculated, and possibly designed, to produce vexation and anger. Nothing so surely baffles your opponents and wins for you the sympathy and support of the friendly and indifferent as imperturbable good temper. Face abuse with a smile; answer gibes with a joke, and you will turn the laugh against your assailants. Under any imaginable provocation, *keep your temper*; this will secure you the advantage everywhere. Lose your temper and you are yourself lost; you give the victory to your opponents.

Another needful quality of Platform Oratory is *courage*—moral and physical. As you should never betray anger, so you should never exhibit fear. In the fiercest conflicts of rival parties you should maintain unflinching firmness. You must learn to face hisses, hootings, groanings, and even more alarming expressions of hostility, with unblenched cheek, with a bold front, with unquivering voice, and with that aspect of cool calm resolve which commands the respect of the strong and cows the weak.

The language of the platform should be at once simple and forcible, pictorial but unornamented. Choose the most familiar words and prefer such as most power-

fully express your meaning. You must not be too fearful of the accusation of coarseness, always brought by feeble speakers against their more successful rivals. If your ideas are not coarse, you may be content to incur the charge of coarseness in words, provided they convey your meaning accurately, are clearly comprehended by your audience, and write upon their minds the impression you desire to make there. The object of oratory is not to display yourself but to persuade others, and that is the right manner of using it which does its work most effectively. He is the best workman who can adapt his tools to the materials he is moulding. This also is not to be forgotten ; that while refined phrases are understood only by the educated few, common words are understood by all. By the former you win the ears of a portion only of your audience ; by the latter you command the attention and impart your thoughts to the minds of the whole assembly.

LETTER XLV.

THE ORATORY OF THE PLATFORM (CONTINUED).

THE Oratory of the Platform comprises many classes of oratory, having certain features in common but also possessing other characteristic traits peculiar to themselves. In my last letter I endeavoured to describe the points on which they agreed; my present purpose is to trace the points on which they differ. I have treated of platform oratory in general, and the most convenient course will be now to consider each of its principal phases separately.

The first of these is the ordinary "public meeting," held for any public purpose, religious, charitable, parochial, or political. With few and very slight adaptations, the hints that apply to one of them will apply to all, excepting, perhaps, to religious and charitable meetings, which require a special train of thought conveyed in a certain conventional diction. Another marked distinction is to be observed upon platforms when ladies are expected to be an important portion of the audience. These are sub-divisions only of the class, and therefore I propose to take the various kinds of assembly in order of complexity, beginning with meetings not usually honoured by the presence of bonnets.

The *Parish Meeting* will include every public meeting of the same nature—free assemblies open to all comers, for the expression of opinion upon the subject it is sum-

moned to consider. Local affairs are the most frequent business of vestries, municipalities and such like. Holden for the transaction of business, generalities, platitudes and declamatory eloquence are out of place. You must address the meeting in a business-like fashion, merely *talking* upon your legs, strictly limiting your talk to the matter in hand and saying what you have to say in the fewest words. You will not thus obtain the fame of an orator, but you will win the more useful reputation among your neighbours of being a sensible man, whose speech is worth listening to, and a man of business, whose advice is worth taking. Eschew the oratorical in matter and manner; study simplicity in language and in style; put your arguments very plainly, and above all, come well prepared with your facts and figures. These, you will say, are somewhat difficult conditions.' They are so, and accordingly they are infrequently fulfilled. They who have never tried it think that anybody who can open his lips upstanding could make a speech good enough for a parish meeting; but they will find it to be otherwise in practice, and as the personal advantages of capacity in this class of speaking are very great to all, but especially to a professional man seeking advancement in the world, it will well repay some study on your part.

The difficulty is precisely that which attaches to all endeavours to be natural. It is much more difficult to be plain than to be ornate, to be simple than to be artificial, to be what you are than what you are not. Savagery delights in tinsel; it is the last triumph of civilisation to bring us back to nature.

Political meetings and *quasi* political meetings, require a different treatment; but, to avoid repetition, I will reserve them for consideration of the subjects to

which they are mainly allied, and pass to the assemblies of which ladies usually form the most considerable part.

Religious, charitable, and social meetings have a platform oratory of their own, brought probably to their present fashion by the fact that the majority of the hearers are of the sex whom the speaker is most desirous to please, and to whose tastes and capacities he more or less consciously moulds his discourse.

There is a speciality in the *Religious Meetings* of which it is not my design to treat; but of whose existence you must be informed, or you will come to grief should you venture an address to one of them.

Their language is singularly conventional. They have a phraseology of their own that is almost unintelligible to the uninitiated. It is the very opposite of simplicity. A considerable portion of their vocabulary differs from the language of common life. There are two words, and only two, that express it; but I am reluctant to use them, because they have come to be employed in an offensive sense, and I do not by any means design or desire to imply ridicule or reproach. Suffice it to say, that in the religious meeting this phraseology performs the same office as slang in the sporting world and patter among the gipsies; it has come to convey more readily and more accurately to the initiated the ideas which the speaker seeks to convey than does the language of daily life. It is almost a condition of success in such gatherings that the platform should resound with these conventional phrases.

Another characteristic of such meetings is a certain grave humour, which has been growing into fashion for some time past and now reigns supreme. Gravity by no means distinguishes the orators at religious meetings;

on the contrary, a grave man, who never said a funny thing to make his audience laugh would be voted a bore; and in this you will see another striking illustration of a remark I have had occasion to make more than once—that the gravest moments, when the most serious subjects are in progress, are precisely those at which we are the most easily moved to laughter; the philosophical reason for which is, that humour, which is the provocative of laughter, is a keen sense of the contrast between two very dissimilar ideas unexpectedly presented to the mind.

With these *additions*, the Oratory of the Platform at mixed meetings requires the same qualifications, and is to be cultivated in the same manner, as for most other meetings composed of both sexes, and in treating of their characteristics, I shall be compelled somewhat to sacrifice gallantry to truth.

If I were to advise you to address your discourse to the men, and not to the women, who are seated before your platform, I am sure you would not adopt my advice, and therefore I will assume the actual instead of the ideal state of a platform orator and direct my hints to helping you in the situation in which you will find yourself in practice.

You may now declaim to your heart's content. The less of argument the better. You must not hope to convince, but only to persuade; for women—and men with woman-like minds—always mistake feeling for conviction and faith for belief. Your appeal must be to the emotions. Argument should not be attempted, or it should be so presented as to be utterly illogical in substance and shape. You may indulge with perfect safety in the most transparent fallacies, especially if they

fall in with the prejudices of your audience. Introduce as many anecdotes as possible, for the purpose of illustrating your assertions; nothing so tells with a mixed audience, especially if you point the moral with the assumption that the one case proves the whole. If, for instance, it is your purpose to abuse an entire class of persons; tell a story of something which you once saw done by some one member of that class, and boldly draw the inference that therefore the whole class is equally hateful, or as the case may be. Thus you are sure to carry with you the minds of the unreasoning part of your audience, always the vast majority of them. The language of your speech cannot be too poetical: scatter flowers without stint—they are sure to be taken for flights of the grandest eloquence. The substance of what you say is not of so much importance as the form in which you say it. Nonsense, that flows in a full swell from the lips in rounded periods with fine phrases that roll into and fill the ears, will surely be accepted with pleasure and elicit a chorus of applause. An occasional laugh is effective; but far more telling is an occasional touch of the pathetic, especially if expressed in the tones of pathos. Freight your froth with a moral reflection by way of ballast, and flavour it with a sentiment now and then; it needs not to be new; on the contrary, the more nearly it approaches a truism, the more readily will it be understood.

There is some art in mingling these ingredients so as not to offend by excess of quantity, always more dangerous than defect in quality. On the slightest intimation that your audience are growing weary of one strain, start them upon another, and, if possible, an opposite one. Call them from long-continued gravity by a timely

jest, and recall them from laughter to seriousness by plunging into your soberest themes. Wonderful is the effect of contrast in heightening the opposite emotions and thus re-kindling the flagging attention.

Perhaps you will say that these are unworthy arts. They may be so; but they are not the less necessary to success. It is useless to make a speech unless you can thereby influence either the opinions, the feelings, or the actions, of your hearers; if you do not choose to adopt the means by which this object can be effected, you have no right to complain of failure. Argument, however able, is wasted upon those who cannot comprehend it; the best intentions will not induce an audience to lend their ears to a dull discourse, badly delivered. The arts requisite to the attainment of your purpose are not in themselves censurable; and, if you deem them unworthy, it should be because you feel yourself to be above the part you are compelled to perform. You should not attempt to address such an audience, unless you are prepared to bring yourself down to the level of their intelligence; but, having resolved to address them, you must talk after *their* fashion, and not according to your own ideal of something better and loftier. Indeed, this rule extends to all oratory. There is no compulsion upon you to make a speech; if you cannot conform to the character of your audience, you have the remedy in your own hands by refusal to depart from your own standard of good sense or good taste; but, having resolved to appear upon the platform, play your part properly, according to the work to be done and the materials upon which you work, and submit, if not cheerfully yet thoroughly, to the conditions by which alone success is practicable.

Nor will the exercise be without benefit to you. To unbend, to come down from the high regions of pure reason and place yourself on a level with common minds—to be *unwise* now and then—even to put on the cap and bells for the amusement of women and small-minded men—is not altogether time wasted. Something is to be learned from contact with your fellow-creatures, that will often serve to filter philosophy and make wisdom practical. You will return to the lofty region of your meditations, refreshed by the relaxation and with a new page added to your knowledge of human nature. It is not a very noble one that is revealed in such gatherings as those for commanding whose applause I have here endeavoured to give you some hints; but it is, perhaps, the most extensive of any, for it is the exhibition of the commonplace mind, in the condition in which it is most open to observation.

LETTER XLVI.

THE ORATORY OF THE PLATFORM (CONTINUED.)

I WILL now ask you to accompany me to the Public Meeting, properly so called, to which not only are all classes invited, but to which they come. Let us see how these should be treated from the platform.

Occasionally, some topic of local interest will gather together an assemblage representing the whole population; but the true public meeting is seldom evoked for any but political purposes. At all events, a political meeting, and especially an election, is the typical assembly that will most conveniently illustrate the hints I am about to offer to you for the cultivation of that most important branch of platform oratory. If I treat of it with more minuteness of detail than I have devoted to some other parts of the subject, it is because experience has proved to me the great importance of proficiency in this art, especially to the members of our Profession, who, more than any others, are called upon to exercise it. At political meetings, the Lawyers are always expected to be the speakers, and *are* so. Their fellow-citizens assume it to be their business to talk and therefore look to them as the proper mouthpieces of a meeting. A Solicitor in the provinces can scarcely avoid the leadership of a party and the conduct of the elections. He cannot properly discharge the duties of these posts of honour and influence, unless he can make a tolerable

speech at a public meeting ; and the more his skill in the management of a popular assembly, the greater his power, the higher his position, and the more valuable his services.

The art of Platform Oratory is not less useful to the Barrister. If you should not be called upon to act on behalf of other candidates, I hope you may at some time hereafter be required to exercise the art in that character on your own account, and then you will find it to be of equal service to yourself. It is because I have had extensive experience in both characters, and have gained such knowledge of it as I possess in the rough school of personal encounter with these characteristic assemblies, that I venture to impart to you the result of that experience.

To speak plainly, then, this class of public meeting is a *mob* ; no other word so properly describes it ; the speaking that alone will succeed with it is mob-oratory.

You must not shrink from this title because it is often used reproachfully by those who are unable to accomplish it. The name of "Mob Orator" is always given to a speaker who can really influence a miscellaneous meeting. If you cannot bear with it, you should make up your mind at once to retreat from the pursuit of ambition in public or political life. To succeed, you must submit to the conditions of success. Your object is to sway the minds of those whom you address ; to do this you must speak in such manner as most moves them, and whatever name is given to that manner you must accept without shame, or resign the objects you are seeking. But though the name of "Mob Orator" is of ill repute, the evil is in the name only ; there is nothing in the character necessarily dishonourable or degrading. The art is an honest art, provided only that it be not

applied to dishonest ends. No man has cause to be ashamed of swaying the minds of his fellow-men, even though they may be called "a mob." Persuasion is as permissible an instrument wherewith to move men as argument, and an appeal to the feelings is often as righteous as an address to the reason. If the utterance of sentiment and emotion is not so lofty an exercise of the intellect as the putting forth of logic, there is in it nothing degrading, either to the mind that speaks or to the ear that listens. It is simply an adaptation of means to the end.

Understand me, that I use the word "mob" only for brevity's sake, and because I can find no other word that so nearly expresses my meaning. But you must not read it in quite the popular sense. As commonly used, it implies a *disorderly* assembly: I use it as describing a *miscellaneous* gathering of all classes, but in which the lower classes predominate. The tone of such a meeting is therefore necessarily given by the most numerous section of it; and although the most cultivated minds leaven it more or less, according to the proportion they bear to the whole crowd, the general character of the mass will always be caught from the character of the predominant class.

Here it is that you may witness the most striking proofs of the power of *sympathy*. No observant and reflecting man can doubt the presence and potency of this influence of mind upon mind, operating through some unknown medium within certain undefined limits. The proofs are rife in the records of the past and may be seen around us continually. It is an influence to which, as it appears to me, sufficient importance has not been given either by historians or philosophers, and its presence would probably be found to solve many problems other-

wise inexplicable. That influence seems to be exercised by mere contact, without communication through the five senses, and to be multiplied by numbers, so that the emotions of all are imparted to each. This would explain the entire series of those perplexing phenomena which are seen in popular phrenzies, delusions and manias, and of which a panic will offer the most intelligible explanation. It is a fact that fear is thus communicated by some imperceptible influence. An incident that would not cause the nerves of one man to quiver, will make ten men turn pale, annihilate the courage of twenty men, cause a hundred men to run away, and deprive a thousand men of reason. What is this, but fear operating by multiplication of fear? The small fright felt by each influences all the rest by sympathy, and the result is that the accumulated fear of the entire mass imparts itself to each individual of it, and causes the terror that is not the less real because it is unfounded. Precisely the same operation that produces panic is ever at work in all mixed assemblies, swaying them by other emotions, and so great is this influence, that even the most powerful intellects that are habitually under the sway of reason find resistance very difficult.

I have enlarged upon this subject because the knowledge of it will conduce greatly to success upon the platform. This fact is the foundation of mob-oratory; you will not sway a mixed assembly, unless you take into account that power of sympathy. You will, I hope, clearly understand what I mean by it when the term is here used.

What, then, is the character of the assembly thus strangely influenced?

In the first place, it is almost wholly impulsive. It is

governed entirely by its feelings. Reason has scarcely a perceptible control over it. Argument, such as the trained intellect recognises and obeys, is of no avail.

Consequently, you must address yourself to its emotions. What is their character ?

To the honour of human nature be it said, that the *emotions* of a multitude—of men in masses—are almost always right, as their *judgment* is almost always wrong. Even if they fall into wrong acts, these are usually the results of right feelings. Some generous or noble sentiment will be found to underlie emotions that bear the aspect of malevolence, and to be the parent of passions that are demoniacal in their issues.

It has been noticed in the penny theatres, frequented by the population that feeds our gaols, that a noble, a generous, or an honest sentiment never fails to evoke a burst of applause. Vice receives no honour even from the vicious, who cheer the virtue they will not practise. A play that did not end with the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue would be hooted from the boards patronised by the criminal class !

A mob has a large measure of self-esteem—as if proud of the power of numbers. The humblest person feels his self-importance swell by association ; he is not conscious of his individual insignificance in the crowd.

An English mob possesses, to a marked degree, the English sense of humour. It is readily tickled to laughter, and often its swelling wrath may be turned aside by a judicious jest. But it is by humour, not by wit, that a mob is moved. The keenest *wit* would be unappreciated, because it is not understood. *Humour* never fails.

A mob is usually good-tempered, perhaps always so,

save where the very object of the meeting is to give expression to evil emotions previously engendered. Beware, then, how you run counter to the passion of the moment. If you would avert it, you must fall in with it, that you may guide it. Admit the grievance, acknowledge the justice of that indignation, but suggest some other redress. Perfect good-temper on your part will go far to ensure good-temper on the part of your audience. Let no provocation induce you for one moment to lose your temper. Meet hootings with a smile and parry abuse with a jest; if there is disturbance, be calm and composed, fold your arms, and await patiently the return of order, without the slightest expression of vexation or alarm. Soon you will find the majority of the meeting enlisted in your support and compelling the disorderly minority to silence or expulsion. I have never known this to fail, even amid the tempest that usually rages around the hustings at an election.

If there be a show of violence, make no show of fear. A mob is very cowardly; it is wholly wanting in moral courage, and it can boast but of little physical courage, because it has no cohesion nor mutual reliance. Happily, the multiplication of emotion, which makes its passions so formidable, does not extend to its acts. It wants the capacity for effective action; it has no unity, no organisation, no confidence; it is disintegrated, and each individual atom of which it is composed is compelled to look only to himself, not being assured whether his neighbours will not desert him in his need. A firm front, a bold eye, a brave bearing on your part, will not only strike a kind of awe into the offenders, but certainly command the respect of the many, who feel a strong sympathy

with these qualities, wherever shown, and enlist a support that will effectually protect you from the threatened violence. They will even shame the furious from their intent. I have seen the mob drop the stones they had lifted to throw and greet with an enthusiastic cheer the man whom they had failed to terrify.

This being the characteristic of an English mob, such as you will have to encounter at political gatherings, and especially at elections, you will readily learn how to deal with it.

The inexperienced imagine that a mob will prefer an orator who descends to its own level and talks to it after its own fashion. This is a grave mistake. A mob likes best the speaker who stands *above* his audience, and keeps above them. To talk down to them is condescension, than which nothing is more obnoxious. The loftier the orator the more gratifying to the assembly is his deference to them. Moreover, an English mob has the English love of aristocracy: as a mob they do not relish orators of their own class; they prefer to listen to a gentleman, and if he bears a title, so much the more is he welcome. Successful mob-oratory, therefore, by no means implies vulgarity, or coarseness of speech or of manner. On the contrary, put on your grandest manner and speak in your loftiest style; but with this proviso, that your language is not too fine. In the progress of these epistles I have had such frequent occasion to urge upon you the avoidance of learned language, and the preference of plain English for the transmission of your thoughts to others, that I fear to weary you by repetition; but if it be a useful hint for addressing even select assemblies, it is a necessity for successful speaking to a mob. You may do so without

lapsing into vulgarity, for it is the glory of our English tongue—and perhaps we are indebted to it for much of the power of the British nation—that the thoughts of the wise may not only be clothed, but conveyed with accuracy and force, in the language of the common people.

LETTER XLVII.

ORATORY OF THE PLATFORM (CONCLUDED.)

THE speaker who can influence a mob is usually stigmatised by those who are unable to do so as a demagogue. It is well to be advised of this probable consequence of successful Platform Oratory, that you may be prepared to meet and defy it. But true demagoguism consists, not in the use of those arts of oratory by which an assembly is moved—not in saying in the most effective manner that which you desire to say, and may with honour say—but in saying that which is not your sincere opinion, or which you do not verily believe, for the purpose of insuring applause and support. If you are honest with your audience, you may rightfully express your honest thoughts in any fashion that will best secure for them a welcome; but if you seek to lure by the utterance of that which is not your faith, you play the demagogue and that justly odious title is then properly affixed to you.

The manner of mob oratory should, like the matter of it, be bold, confident, and energetic. You must feel the most perfect self-confidence and show it; you must speak out with the full compass of your voice, throw all your power—mental and physical—into the effort, and employ emphatic action. Let there be no appearance of hesitation for thoughts or words; go on; say something, sense or nonsense, anything rather than seem perplexed. An English mob is peculiarly sensitive to whatever savours of

the ludicrous, and quick to seize upon weaknesses and turn them to ridicule. A public meeting at an election time licenses every wag in the crowd to let off a joke at your expense, and he is not slow to avail himself of the opportunity. Never wince under it; or, at least, if it pricks you, do not show that you are hit. If you have sufficient self-possession, join in the laugh and laughingly turn the jest upon the jester. This leaves you master of the field, and his discomfiture will deter those in the crowd who are always ready to follow the lead.

The kind of interruptions with which you are liable to be visited by the irreverent jesters who form part of every mob are exhibited in the admirable description of the election in "*Pickwick*." The gentleman with a weak voice is advised by one in the crowd "to send home and inquire if he had left his voice under the pillow;" and the mayor is interrupted by a shout of "Success to his worship the mayor, and may he never forget the tin and sarsepan business as he has got his fortun by." These are not exaggerations of the fun you will have to face at an election, and you must be prepared to receive it with good humour.

Speak out. Speak up. Do not wait for the significant shout that will come to you if you speak *small*. Not only is your power over a crowd dependent upon your being heard, but a full, clear voice has a power of its own, apart from the thoughts which it conveys. It creates an impression of reality and earnestness; it commands attention, and the mind itself is more readily reached through the full ear.

And this is a fit occasion for a few hints on oratory in the open air.

Most persons find this very difficult of accomplishment,

very trying to the lungs, and very crazing, indeed, to the voice. Beginners usually speak from a window, or from a hustings, in the same tones as they use in a room. They are immediately put out by finding that the sounds they have sent forth seem to be swallowed up in space, and that no echo of them comes back to their ears. Consequently they are in utter ignorance how far off they have been heard. If not unpleasantly informed by the usual cry of "Speak out," from beyond the favoured circle in the foreground, the unpractised orator has no means whatever of measuring his fire. In either case, he strains his voice to the utmost, with still the same unpleasant sensation that it is lost. Louder and louder; still no echo; then pain; then hoarseness, which will not be cured for days. But when you speak in the open air, there is no echo; your voice will be heard just as far as you can throw it, and no further, and it will grow fainter as the distance grows, until the words die away in inarticulate murmurs. Nature has given great variety of powers of voice, and if the vocal organs have not been framed for it, no training will create power. But the voice may be vastly strengthened by judicious exercise, under instruction, and in a former letter I have thrown out some suggestions for educating it. Besides the compass of the voice, there is a great deal in its management. Mere loudness will not suffice for the open air and straining will never succeed. At the moment the effort becomes painful, the voice loses in force, and a sense of pain is the best warning that you have trespassed beyond your capacities. On the instant that the sensation occurs, moderate your tones, relax the exertion, and rather close your speech than continue it at such risk of injury to your voice.

But mere *loudness* will not make the voice audible in the open air more than in a room. You will be heard further by help of clearness and fullness of sound, and, more than all, by very distinct articulation. You should speak slowly, looking at the most distant of the assembly, and the voice addressed to them, even if *they* should be beyond its reach, will fall upon the furthest ear to which its capacities can extend. Here, also, it is of the utmost importance that you should use the *upward* inflection; that is, that you should raise the voice at every pause or close of a sentence, instead of lowering it.

In open-air speaking it is impossible to employ the delicate variety of tones so effective in a room, where the voice may be lowered almost to a whisper without being lost to the audience, for the degree of loudness necessary to be exercised where there is no echo to help you forbids the expression of more than the ruder tones of emotion, and these must be somewhat exaggerated to be effective. Consequently, action is especially demanded on such occasions. When the great orator of the ancients placed action as the foremost, and, indeed, almost the only, rule he could prescribe for oratory, he had in his mind the open-air assemblies to which alone he was accustomed. Thus limited, the saying is more true than it appears when applied to the oratory usually required in the less genial atmosphere of the North. But when you speak in the open air, you are under the conditions assumed by him, and you should resort to action liberally, both in quantity and quality. Not only should there be much of it, but it may be what in a room would be called exaggeration and bad taste. To the mass of your audience it is like an interpretation of your words; to the illiterate it is more readily intelligible than words. By attracting

the eye it keeps dull minds awake, and secures attention—an effort to which the common mind is not easily induced. The expression “beating a speech into them” has a truth in it.

And for the matter of your speech, it should be *thorough*. A mob cannot understand refined distinctions; it does not relish half-heartedness; it hates qualifications and hesitations. Go with them or go against them, but you must not halt half way. Be very earnest. Their perceptions are marvellously keen; they can detect hollowness by a sort of instinct, and although they do not express the suspicion by outward gesture, you will see by their manner that you have not carried them with you. There is at least one satisfactory characteristic of a mob; it is thoroughly honest. If it approves, it is with no half applause; if it dissents from you, it plainly tells you so. Its cheers and hisses alike mean what they say, and as they are given without reserve, you are left in no doubt as to the effect of your speech. This is very pleasant after the silence of some cold and critical audience, from whose hands or lips you cannot gather whether you have contented or displeased them. The expression of undisguised applause by a crowd is an intoxicating sensation which, however the sober man may despise it, is certainly a pleasure that will not be lightly esteemed by those who have tasted of it.

It is singular that the best specimen of mob oratory which the world possesses should be the product of the creative genius of a dramatist. But so it is; Shakespeare has given to us, among his many marvellous inspirations, two speeches supposed to be addressed to mobs, each in its way admirable, but one of them having consummate excellence. In *Julius Cæsar* he has intro-

duced two orations, by men of very different characters, having different aims : one designed to subdue, the other to excite, the passions of the audience ; the one all honesty, the other all art. The scene follows immediately upon the death of Cæsar by the daggers of the assassins, of whom Brutus was the chief. The mob are hesitating whether to applaud the patriotism that had killed a tyrant, or to condemn the daggers that had destroyed an admired and honoured emperor. Whether the current of this wavering mood was to be turned to applause or wrath, would depend upon the skilful management of those who might address them. Both were men held in high esteem by the populace, but for different qualities : Brutus for his known honesty, frankness and patriotism ; Antony for his persuasiveness, his flattery, his lavishness and the charm that youth carries with it. Brutus was upon his defence, although no accuser had appeared ; he had killed Cæsar, and he aimed to justify the deed to those who had been Cæsar's votaries. They were still hesitating between the man and the act ; he sought to satisfy them that he had done the deed unselfishly, for the salvation of *their* liberties. His case was plain and straightforward and thus plainly he set it before them. It is perfect for its purpose. I have, as before, indicated by italics, capitals and dashes, the manner in which it should be read, beginning with a loud firm voice, and preserving throughout the tone and manner of unbending dignity.

ROMANS—*Countrymen*—and *lovers* !—*hear* me for my *cause*—and be *silent*—that you may *hear*—Believe me for mine *honour*—and have *respect* to mine honour that you *MAY* believe—*Censure* me in your *wisdom*—and awake your *senses*—that you may the *better* judge—If there be *ANY*

in this assembly—*any* DEAR FRIEND of Cæsar's—to HIM I say, that BRUTUS' love to Cæsar was no less than HIS——If then that friend demand *why* Brutus rose against Cæsar—THIS is my answer——NOT that I loved Cæsar LESS—but that I loved Rome MORE——Had you rather Cæsar were *living*, and die all SLAVES——than that Cæsar were *dead*, to live all FREE MEN?——As Cæsar loved me——I weep for him——as he was *fortunate*——I rejoice at it——as he was *valiant*——I honour him——but——as he was AMBITIOUS——I SLEW him——There is *tears* for his *love*——joy for his *fortune*——honour for his *valour*——and DEATH for his——AMBITION——Who is here so BASE that would be a BONDMAN?——If *any*——SPEAK——for him have I offended——Who is here so *rude* that would not be a ROMAN?——If *any*——SPEAK——for HIM have I offended——Who is here so *vile* that will not love his COUNTRY?——If *any*——SPEAK——for HIM have I offended.——I pause for a REPLY.

Citizens. None, Brutus, none.

Brutus. Then NONE have I OFFENDED——I have done no more to CÆSAR than you should do to BRUTUS——The question of his *death* is enrolled in the CAPITOL——his glory not *extenuated*, wherein he was *worthy*——nor his offences *enforced*, for which he has suffered *death*——Here comes his *body*——mourned by *Mark Antony*——who——though he had no hand in his *death*, shall receive the *benefit* of his dying——a *place* in the *commonwealth*——as which of YOU shall NOT?——With this I depart——that as I *slew* my BEST LOVER for the *good* of ROME——I have the *same* dagger for MYSELF——when it shall please my COUNTRY to *need* my DEATH.

This plain manly speech had the effect designed; it turned the tide of popular feeling, which forthwith began to flow in full flood in favour of the orator and his party. The citizens were excited to enthusiasm. They shout—

Citizens. LIVE——Brutus——*live*——LIVE!

1st Citizen. Bring him with triumph home unto his house.

2nd Cit. Give him a STATUE with his *ancestors*!

3rd Cit. Let HIM be Cæsar.

4th Cit. Cæsar's better parts
 Shall now be crown'd in BRUTUS !
 1st Cit. We'll bring him to his house with shouts and clamours.
 Brutus. My countrymen——
 2nd Cit. Peace——silence
 ——Brutus speaks !
 1st Cit. PEACE, ho !
 Brutus. Good COUNTRYMEN——let me depart alone ;
 And——for my sake——stay here with ANTONY——
 Do grace to Cæsar's CORPSE——and grace his speech——
 Tending to Cæsar's GLORIES——which Mark Antony——
 By our permission——is allowed to make——
 I do ENTREAT you——not a man depart——
 Save I alone——till Antony have spoke. [Exit.
 1st Cit. Stay, ho ! and let us hear Mark Antony !
 3rd Cit. Let him go up into the public chair——
 We'll hear him——Noble Antony——go up !
 Ant. For Brutus' sake I am beholden to you.
 4th Cit. What does he say of Brutus ?
 3rd Cit. He says——for Brutus' sake
 He finds himself beholden to US ALL.
 4th Cit. 'Twere best he speak no harm of BRUTUS here.
 1st Cit. This Cæsar was a TYRANT.
 3rd Cit. Nay, that's certain ;
 We are bless'd that Rome is rid of him.
 2nd Cit. PEACE——Let us hear what Antony can say.
 Ant. You gentle Romans——
 Cit. PEACE, ho !——let us hear him.

This was the unfriendly and even prejudiced mob which Antony was to address. Observe how artfully he begins with an endeavour to conciliate them so far as to give him a hearing ; how he falls in with the current of their humour, and goes with it, that he may guide it. Every part of this marvellous address will reward your careful study : its art is unrivalled ; there is nothing like it upon record, nor in the whole range of fiction could

its equal be found. It is a model of Platform Oratory. He begins in a low voice, with tones expressing profound grief, and a manner showing extreme deference to the assembly around him. He is about to appeal from their love for their country to their love for the man whose bleeding corpse was then lying at his side.

Friends———*ROMANS*———*COUNTRYMEN*———*lend me*
your ears———

I come to BURY Cæsar——not to PRAISE him——

The EVIL that men do lives *after* them——

The GOOD——is oft *interred* with their bones——

So——let it be——with Cæsar———The noble *Brutus*

Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious——

If it *were* so——it was a grievous *fault*——

And grievously hath Cæsar *answered* it——

Here——under leave of *Brutus* and the *rest*——

(For *Brutus* is an honourable man——

So are they *all*——ALL honourable men)——

Come I to speak in Cæsar's FUNERAL——

He was my *friend*——*faithful* and *just* to me——

But *Brutus* says——he was AMBITIOUS——

And *Brutus* is an honourable man——

He hath brought many *captives* home to Rome

Whose *ransoms* did the *general* coffers fill——

Did THIS in Cæsar seem AMBITIOUS?——

When that the POOR have *cried*——CÆSAR hath *wept*——

AMBITION should be made of *sterner* stuff——

Yet *Brutus* *says* he was *ambitious*——

And BRUTUS is an honourable man.——

You *all* did see that——on the *Lupercal*——

I *thrice* presented him a kingly CROWN——

Which he did *thrice* REFUSE——Was THIS AMBITION?——

Yet BRUTUS says——he was AMBITIOUS——

And *sure* HE is an honourable man——

I speak not to disprove what BRUTUS *spoke*——

But *here* I am to speak what I do KNOW——

You ALL did love him ONCE——not without *cause*——

What cause withholds you then to MOURN for him?—
 O JUDGMENT—thou art fled to brutish BEASTS
 And MEN have lost their *reason*!—Bear with me—
 My *heart* is in the *coffin* THERE—with CÆSAR—
 And I must *pause*—till it come back to me—

At this point of pause, artfully introduced, the mob exhibits signs of being swayed by the speaker,—they are beginning to veer round again.

1st *Cit.* Methinks, there is much *reason* in his *sayings*.

2nd *Cit.* If thou consider *rightly* of the matter, Cæsar *had* great
 WRONG—

3rd *Cit.*

Has he, *masters*?—

I fear there will a worse come in *his* place.

4th *Cit.* Marked ye his *words*?—he would not take *the crown*—
 Therefore 'tis certain he was not AMBITIOUS—

1st *Cit.* If it be found so, SOME will dear abide it.

2nd *Cit.* Poor *soul*—his eyes are red as *fire* with WEEPING.

3rd *Cit.* There's not a *nobler* man in Rome than ANTONY.

4th *Cit.* Now mark him, he begins *again* to *speak*.

The orator perceives the impression he has made, and now addresses himself to their great love for his friend, and the memory of Cæsar's former greatness. His tones express profound emotion.

But YESTERDAY—the WORD of Cæsar might
 Have stood against the world—NOW—*lies* he there—
 And none so poor to do him *reverence*—
 O *masters*!—if I were disposed to *stir*
 Your hearts—and minds—to *mutiny* and *rage*—
 I should do BRUTUS *wrong*—and Cassius *wrong*—
 Who—you all *know*—are *honourable* men—
 I will NOT do them *wrong*—I rather choose
 To *wrong* the *dead*—to *wrong* *myself*—and YOU—
 Than I will *wrong* SUCH *honourable* men—
 But—here's a *parchment*—with the seal of CÆSAR—
 I *found* it in his *closet*—'t is his WILL—

Let but the commons hear THIS testament——
 Which——*pardon me*——I do not mean to *read*——
 And they would *go*——and kiss DEAD Cæsar's wounds——
 And dip their napkins in his sacred BLOOD——
 Yea——beg a *hair* of him——for MEMORY——
 And—dying—mention it within their *wills*——
Bequeathing it——as a rich *legacy*——
 Unto their issue.

4th *Cit.* We'll hear the WILL.——Read it, Mark Antony.

Cit. The WILL—the WILL—we *will* hear Cæsar's WILL.

Ant. Have *patience*—gentle friends——I MUST not read it——
 It is not *meet* you know *how* Cæsar *lov'd* you——
 You are not WOOD—you are not STONES—but men——
 And being MEN—hearing *the will* of CÆSAR——
 It will *inflame* you——it will make you MAD——
 'T is good you know not that YOU are his HEIRS——
 For—if you SHOULD—O *what* would come of it!——

4th *Cit.* Read the will—we will *hear* it, Antony——
 You shall read us the *will*——CÆSAR's will.——

Ant. Will you be *patient*?——Will you *stay* awhile?——
 I have o'ershot myself to tell you of it——
 I *fear*——I wrong the HONOURABLE men

Whose DAGGERS have stabbed Cæsar——I DO fear it.——

4th *Cit.* They were *traitors*——HONOURABLE men——

Cit. The WILL——the TESTAMENT.——

2nd *Cit.* They were VILLAINS——MURDERERS——The *will*
 ——read the WILL!

Ant. You *will* COMPEL me then to *read* the will?——
 Then make a ring about the *corpse* of CÆSAR
 And let me show you *him* that *made* the WILL——
 Shall I *descend*?——and will you *give me leave*?

Cit. Come down!

2nd *Cit.* Descend!

3rd *Cit.* You *shall* have leave.

4th *Cit.* A *ring*——stand round.

1st *Cit.* Stand from the *hearse*——stand from the body.

2nd *Cit.* Room for Antony——most noble Antony.——

Ant. Nay, press not so upon me——stand far off.——

Cit. Stand back!——room!——bear back!

Antony. If you have TEARS—prepare to shed them now—
 You—ALL—do know *this* mantle—I remember
 The *first* time ever Cæsar put it on—
 'Twas on a summer's evening—in his tent—
 That day he overcame the Nervii—
 LOOK!—in *this* place ran *Cassius'* DAGGER through—
 See—what a *rent* the envious CASCA made—
 Through THIS—the well-beloved BRUTUS *stabbed*
 And—as he plucked his CURSED steel away—
 Mark—how the BLOOD of Cæsar followed it
 As rushing out of doors to be resolved
 If BRUTUS so *unkindly* knocked—or no—
 For BRUTUS—as you know—was Cæsar's ANGEL—
 Judge! O you GODS—how DEARLY Cæsar loved him—
 This was the most unkindest *cut* of ALL—
 For—when the noble Cæsar saw HIM *stab*—
Ingratitude—more strong than *traitors'* arms—
 Quite vanquished him—then *burst* his MIGHTY heart;
 And—in his mantle muffling up his *face*—
 Even at the base of Pompey's statua—
 Which all the while ran BLOOD—*great*—CÆSAR—FELL—;
 O—*what* a FALL was *there*—my countrymen—
 Then *I*—and *you*—and *all of us* fell down—
 Whilst *bloody* TREASON flourished over us—
 O—*now* you *weep*—and I perceive you feel
 The dint of PITY—these are *gracious* drops—
 KIND souls—*what*—*weep* you when you but behold
 Our Cæsar's *vesture* wounded?—Look you HERE—
 HERE is HIMSELF — *marred* — as you see — with
 TRAITORS—

1st *Cit.* O piteous spectacle!

2nd *Cit.* O noble Cæsar!

3rd *Cit.* O woful day!

4th *Cit.* O traitors—VILLAINS!

1st. *Cit.* O most bloody sight!

2nd *Cit.* We will be *revenged*—REVENGE—about—seek—burn
 —fire—kill—slay—let not a traitor live.—

Ant. Stay—COUNTRYMEN.—

1st *Cit.* Peace there—hear the noble Antony—

2nd Cit. We'll *hear* him — we'll *follow* him — we'll *die* with him.——

Ant. GOOD *friends*——SWEET *friends*——let me not stir you up To such a sudden flood of MUTINY——

They that have done this deed are *honourable*——

What PRIVATE *griefs* they have——alas!——*I* know not——

That *made* them do it——they are *wise* and *honourable*——

And will——no doubt——with *reasons* answer you——

I come not——*friends*——to *steal* away your hearts——

I am no *orator*——as BRUTUS is——

But——as *you* know me *all*——a——*plain blunt man*——

That love my *friend*——and that *they* know full well——

That gave me public leave to speak of him——

For *I* have neither *wit*——nor *words*——nor *worth*——

Action——nor *utterance*——nor the power of *speech*

To stir men's *blood*——*I* only speak *right* on——

I tell you——that which *you yourselves* do KNOW——

Show you sweet *Cæsar's* WOUNDS——*poor*——*poor*——*dumb*

MOUTHS——

And bid THEM speak for me——But were *I* Brutus

And Brutus ANTONY——*there* were an Antony

Would ruffle up your *spirits*——and put a *tongue*

In every *wound* of CÆSAR——that should make

The STONES of ROME to *rise*——and MUTINY.

LETTER XLVIII.

SOCIAL ORATORY.

I COME now to that which, until you have tried it, appears the easiest of all forms of oratory, but which is in truth the most difficult of all, and to which I propose to give the significant name of *Social Oratory*, meaning by that the speech-makings that are addressed to small parties assembled, not for business, but for festive or other social purposes, the large proportion of which is demanded at one kind of gathering, said to be so peculiarly English that the title of "Dinner-table Oratory" might have been given to it with almost equal propriety.

Doubtless you will exclaim, "A speech after dinner—a toast proposed—thanks returned—surely anybody who can say anything can do that!" You need not try it to be satisfied that it is very much more difficult than you have thought it to be. Sit at any table where toasts are given and responded to, and seeing what a mess four out of five of the speakers make of it, you will begin to suspect that it is not quite so easy an accomplishment as you had supposed. Vacuity of thought and confusion of words are the prevalent characteristics; some break down altogether; some stammer through a maze of disconnected words; some are fluent, but it is fluent nonsense; some cannot extricate themselves for a moment from the conventional commonplaces. But among them, perhaps, are two or three, *rari nantes in gurgite*

vasto, who say good things, perhaps even new things, in apt language and with a pleasant manner. Yet you will find often that the persons who have so pleased you are by no means distinguished for genius or even for general ability, having intellects rather below the average, and intelligence by no means capacious.

Should you be called upon "to propose a toast," or to return thanks for having been yourself proposed, you will probably make a discovery. You were tolerably fluent and talked sensibly enough at the Union in Oxford, at the Forensic Society in London, and at occasional public meetings; but you feel very foolish now, and look as foolish as you feel. You could talk pretty well when you had a subject to talk about. You have not learned the art of talking about nothing, and the accomplishment of saying something when you have nothing to say.

This is the secret of Social Oratory, and explains its difficulties, its failures, and its successes. It can scarcely be called an art, for it seems to be a special faculty with which a few are gifted, but which is denied to the many. Of course, like all powers of mind or body, it is capable of cultivation, but, like the gift of poetry or music, it must be bestowed by nature, and if the germ is not there, it cannot be implanted by art.

Another peculiarity of this form of oratory is, that the larger the intellect, the more refined the taste, the loftier the intelligence, the more its difficulty in after dinner speaking. The reason is its consciousness and sensitiveness. Its powers are paralysed by perception of the ridiculous contrast between the bigness of the language and the littleness of the subject, by its sense of the hollowness of the praises and professions; it can find nothing to say that is at once new and true, and its pride

revolts from indulgence in the conventionalities which the parrot voices around him repeat again and again, with apparent unconsciousness of their threadbare wearisomeness.

Social Oratory, then, is the art of saying a great deal about nothing and saying it in a pleasant manner. It is not designed for any other purpose than to please for the moment. It partakes of the character of all social intercourse, which is to make ourselves as agreeable to one another as possible and to keep all that is disagreeable out of sight and hearing. The standing-up talk of the dinner-table should be only the sitting-down talk of the drawing-room, somewhat amplified, judiciously strung together, and flavoured with a few flatteries not permitted to be addressed to a man in a *tête-à-tête*, but which you are allowed, and indeed expected, to pour forth without limit of quantity or quality when you are speaking of him to others in his presence.

Can it be, you ask, that such exaggerated epithets as are lavished upon a man, whose health is proposed at a dinner-table, can be gratifying to him? Do not his common sense and good taste revolt, as much as do yours, from laudations so undeserved that they have the appearance of ironical insults? You have not yet learned the measure of human vanity. All men are open to flattery, more or less, but of most men the capacity for it is boundless. The most modest of us is not insensible to its influence, if judiciously employed. "We think that we hate flattery," says the French cynic, "when all that we hate is the awkwardness of the flatterer." This is the key-note to successful Social Oratory. Flattery is its foundation and substance, and success is proportioned to the skill with which it is applied. Coarse

flattery is better than none—but refined flattery, gracefully draped, so that the object of it may enjoy it without the affectation of a disclaimer, is the climax of after-dinner speech-making. But laudatory language is limited. If there are many to be thus honoured at the same table, or if the occasions are frequent, repetition is unavoidable. It matters not. The reiteration that seems so awkward to you is not so apparent nor so disagreeable to your audience. They will laugh again and again at the same joke, applaud with equal fervour the same flourish of compliments to the same persons, as if so good a thing could not be heard too often. It is not necessary, therefore, to Social Oratory that you should be continually saying new things, or dressing up stale thoughts in new sentences. Having mastered a set of phrases, you may repeat them year by year through your life and gain rather than lose reputation by it.

Being thus supplied with stock speeches, you should adapt them somewhat to the special purpose of the gathering. A single allusion to some topic suggested by the moment will carry off many minutes of stale platitudes, and secure for you the reputation of being an accomplished orator. For this purpose you should be ever on the watch, if you know, or suspect, that you are likely to be “called upon.” Cultivate gaiety, rather than gravity, of tone and manner. Shun sermonising. Let your speech smack more of the champagne than the port. Let it be light, sparkling, playful, anything but dull. Suit the manner to the word. Do not attempt the oratorical in tone or action. Do not think of it as a speech, but only as talking on your feet without dialogue. Your business is not to instruct or inform, but to perform a ceremonial gracefully, and if at the same time you can

amuse, it will be a great triumph, and the company will be grateful to you for helping them through the ordeal, which all are content to submit to, though all think it a dreadful bore.

And this is another instance of the power of conventionality. There is not an individual in any party assembled for social purposes who does not look upon this conventional speech-making as an infliction he would gladly avoid, but which he must endure in exchange for the good things of the table and in obedience to custom. So each says privately to his neighbour, who echoes the opinion; the faces of the listeners unmistakably express their feelings, and their vehement applause when the speaker "resumes his seat" indicates rather their sense of joy that the speech is over than of pleasure in the performance. But when his own turn comes each plays the same part, and the custom survives the anathemas, and will probably linger for yet a long time to come.

I cannot offer you hints for education in this branch of oratory other than those already given for some others—*practice*. Little more can be done by way of teaching than to present some of the most prominent features of the art, and, more usefully still, by suggesting what to avoid; but how to learn to do or avoid is a lesson which those who have attempted have always failed to teach, because it cannot be reduced to positive rules, but must depend upon the mental and physical capacities of the speaker. If your own intelligence will not prompt and your own good taste correct you, no instructions from others will drill you into becoming an adept in *Social Oratory*.

POSTSCRIPT.

PENNY READINGS.

INQUIRIES have been made by some of those who have interested themselves in the establishment of Public Readings for some information to aid them in the conduct of such societies. They originated with the Author of this volume, who first proposed and advocated them in the *Critic* and other journals. After the project had been thus subjected to discussion through the press, and received general approval, a party of those who had expressed their approbation of the scheme were invited to form a committee for the purpose of carrying it into operation. They acceded, and Lord Brougham accepted the office of President, the Author and Mr. C. J. Plumptre becoming the Honorary Secretaries.

The Society succeeded in establishing Public Readings in many parts of London, and in still more numerous localities throughout the country. But its indirect uses were of far more importance, for it caused the subject of Public Readings to be discussed in the newspapers, and induced great numbers of persons in all parts of the United Kingdom to study the Art of Reading, that they might qualify themselves to take part in this endeavour to provide wholesome amusement for large classes, among whom the wealth of our literature could never be distributed but in the pleasing and attractive form of good reading. Having succeeded in creating the movement,

the Society ceased from its labours. The work was done.

The results of the experience thus obtained will usefully and not inappropriately close a volume, a considerable part of which is devoted to the Art of Reading.

Half-a-dozen persons will suffice to establish Public Readings in any locality. No large committees nor liberal subscriptions are required. It will probably be self-supporting. At all events, the cost is very trifling. The Town Hall, or the Vestry-room, or the National or British School-room, can always be obtained, at no other expense than the candles for lighting it, and the Readers will be unpaid volunteers.

The admission should be uniformly a *penny*. We found that any higher charge excluded the class whose presence was most desired. On the other hand, free admissions were not valued. The penny kept none away who desired to come, and it excluded those who follow a crowd for love of disorder. The fund thus supplied was almost invariably sufficient to pay the expenses of the Society.

It is desirable to give notice to the visitors that the Readings being designed for their *amusement*, they will not be expected to remain in the room longer than inclination bids. They should be assured that their departure will not be looked upon as unpolite, provided that they go at the close of some reading, and do not interrupt the audience who remain.

The greatest difficulty has been to procure *good* Readers. These Public Readings have revealed the results of the inattention with which the Art of Reading is treated at our schools and the little care given to its acquirement in after-life; for not only is there an

astounding paucity of tolerable Readers, but the vast majority read so badly as to be unendurable to an audience.

Nor is the difficulty of procuring fit Readers the only one with which the Societies have had to grapple. Another trouble has attended this part of their duties, which has been found far more unmanageable, and which has proved, indeed, the single cause of failure with many. Equally astonishing with the entire incapacity to read properly is the ignorance of that incapacity on the part of the Readers. The first step in knowledge is to learn our ignorance; the lowest deep of ignorance is unconsciousness of itself. It is a proof of the neglect into which the Art of Reading has fallen, that even persons of educated taste may not only read execrably, but believe, when they do so, that they are reading well.

This is everywhere the greatest trouble that besets the Public Readings. What can be done with the incapables who offer themselves so liberally as Readers? It is awkward to say "You cannot read;" it is ruinous to the Society to suffer them to read, for they will inevitably scare away the company. Whenever the Public Readings have failed, it has been by reason of the influence of bad Readers upon the audience. Good Readers have never failed to attract and keep a crowded room. Let, then, the Committee or Managers be firm in rejection of incompetency, however respectable or influential. Thank the volunteer for the proffer of service, but tell him frankly that he must give some time to the study of the Art of Reading before he can be admitted to read in public; remind him, good-temperedly, that as he would not dream of attempting to sing in public before he had learned to sing, so neither, without serious and laborious

study of it, should he venture upon Reading, which is an Art requiring education equally with the Art of Singing. The individual responsibility of making an intimation so unpleasing to vanity might be removed by a rule, that no person shall be permitted to read in public without having first read before the Committee and received their approval. If this should be inconvenient, the burden of rejection might be put upon the audience, thus:—Print a monthly list of subjects proposed for reading, with the names of the Readers; send a copy of this list to each of the audience, whose names are entered as members of the Society, with a request that he or she would mark a certain number upon the list as those he would prefer for the next month's selection, and let the choice of the majority be adopted. This would at once interest the audience, by giving them a voice in the Readings which they are invited to hear, and would relieve the Committee from the pain of wounding a sensitive vanity.

In making the selections for the evening, it is necessary to study *variety*. If possible, there should be three or four Readers, or even more, who should read in turn, and if only two, they should alternate. It is found that nothing serves more to keep the attention of the audience than a change of person and voice.

Variety of subject is essential to success;—the grave and the gay, poetry and prose, narrative, dialogue, and declamation should be introduced in turn. This requires some care on the part of the Managers, and it deserves care, for prosperity very much depends upon it.

Readers usually have special qualifications; some excel in poetry, some in dialogue, some in narrative; some give powerful expression to pathos, and some are skilful

in comedy. Allot to each his appropriate work. But, in the distribution of the work, let the Managers resolve, and not the Readers, who, like actors, are rarely judges of their own capacities.

The time given to the Public Readings should be limited. Never should it exceed one hour and a half; but an hour is safer. Better that the audience should depart unwillingly, than that they should go away wearied and glad that it is over.

If your funds will afford it, a programme of the evening's readings should be printed and distributed. This has been found to add largely to the audiences, and the cost is very trifling. It should state the subject of the extract, the name of the Author, and the Reader.

As for the selections, experience has taught much by which it would be well for the managers of Public Readings to profit. Didactic readings, grave, dull, and dry, fail entirely; they clear the benches in a week. Argumentative writing is equally distasteful. Narrative, if interspersed with amusing dialogue, is the most attractive and popular. Then next in favour with miscellaneous audiences are dramatic passages; then, passionate and sentimental compositions, requiring expression on the part of the Readers—poetry of this class being preferred to prose; and, lastly, mere narrative. It must be remembered that the object of these Public Readings is *not* formal instruction, but harmless, elevating, and wholesome amusement. They should be *entertainments* of a superior class—nothing more.

In a former page will be found a List of Readings which have been found by long experience to please a miscellaneous audience.

INDEX.

A.	
ACTION—	
on speaking, hints for ...	page 232
ACTOR, THE—	
art of ...	74
ADJECTIVES—	
use of, to be avoided ...	25
ARTICULATION—	
study of ...	69, 228
ATTITUDE—	
in reading ...	104
B.	
BAR, ORATORY OF—	
neglect of study of ...	9
causes of ...	11
cultivation of ...	264
bad habits ...	265
first studies for ...	267
character of juries ...	268
how to deal with a jury ...	269
style of address to ...	269
good temper ...	271
common juries ...	278
how influenced ...	274
special juries ...	277
how to address the court ...	279
how to address magistrates ...	282
appeal to the feelings ...	283
BIBLE, THE—	
how to read ...	154
BUSINESS SPEECH—	
hints for ...	256
C.	
CLERGY, THE—	
necessity for studying the art of reading ...	109
COMPOSITION—	
on talking, writing, and speaking ...	197
COURT, THE—	
how to address ...	279
D.	
DECLAMATION—	
how to read ...	153
DELIVERY—	
instructions for ...	224

INDEX.

A.							
ACTION—							
on speaking, hints for ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	page 232
ACTOR, THE—							
art of ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	74
ADJECTIVES—							
use of, to be avoided ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	25
ARTICULATION—							
study of ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	69, 228
ATTITUDE—							
in reading ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	104
B.							
BAR, ORATORY OF—							
neglect of study of	...	...	...	...	...	...	9
causes of	...	...	...	...	...	...	11
cultivation of	...	...	...	...	...	...	264
bad habits	...	...	...	...	...	...	265
first studies for	...	...	...	...	...	...	267
character of juries	...	...	...	...	...	...	268
how to deal with a jury	...	...	...	...	...	...	269
style of address to	...	...	...	...	...	...	269
good temper	...	...	...	...	...	...	271
common juries	...	...	...	...	...	...	273
how influenced	...	...	...	...	...	...	274
special juries	...	...	...	...	...	...	277
how to address the court	...	...	...	...	...	...	279
how to address magistrates	...	...	...	...	...	...	282
appeal to the feelings	...	...	...	...	...	...	283
BIBLE, THE—							
how to read	...	...	...	...	...	...	154
BUSINESS SPEECH—							
hints for	...	...	...	...	...	...	256
C.							
CLERGY, THE—							
necessity for studying the art of reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	109
COMPOSITION—							
on talking, writing, and speaking	...	...	...	...	...	...	197
COURT, THE—							
how to address	...	...	...	...	...	...	279
D.							
DECLAMATION—							
how to read	...	...	...	...	...	...	153
DELIVERY—							
instructions for	...	...	...	...	...	...	224

READING, ART OF—(continued)

causes of neglect of	...	...	...	...	...	...	page 11
what to read	...	...	...	...	...	...	28
uses of ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	59
good reading conducs to good speaking	...	...	...	...	...	...	59
requirements of	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
of reading rightly	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
necessary to understand	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
rapidity of perception	...	...	...	...	...	...	61
practice for	...	...	...	...	...	...	62
reading aloud	...	...	...	...	...	...	62
what to avoid	...	...	...	...	...	...	64
mannerism	...	...	...	...	...	...	64
monotony	...	...	...	...	...	...	64
first lesson	...	...	...	...	...	...	65
articulation	...	...	...	...	...	...	67
pronunciation of sentences	...	...	...	...	...	...	69
expression	...	...	...	...	...	...	70
sympathy	...	...	...	...	...	...	72
difference between acting and reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	74
understanding and feeling	...	...	...	...	...	...	77
management of the voice	...	...	...	...	...	...	80
tone	...	...	...	...	...	...	84
emphasis	...	...	...	...	...	...	87
pause and punctuation	...	...	...	...	...	...	93
management of the breath	...	...	...	...	...	...	96
inflection	...	...	...	...	...	...	98
attitude...	...	...	...	...	...	...	101
mental cultivation	...	...	...	...	...	...	103
clerical reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	105, 109
illustration	...	...	...	...	...	...	113
lessons in reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	115
reading by children	...	...	...	...	...	...	119
Hamlet's Soliloquy	...	...	...	...	...	...	122
Hamlet's Speech to the Players	...	...	...	...	...	...	124
Macbeth's Soliloquy	...	...	...	...	...	...	126
Burial of Sir John Moore	...	...	...	...	...	...	128
Queen Mab	...	...	...	...	...	...	130
Nathan's Parable	...	...	...	...	...	...	132
Death of Paul Dombey	...	...	...	...	...	...	135
how to read poetry	...	...	...	...	...	...	138
Invocation to Light	...	...	...	...	...	...	143
Julia's Letter	...	...	...	...	...	...	145
narrative	...	...	...	...	...	...	147
didactic works...	...	...	...	...	...	...	149
sentimental works	...	...	...	...	...	...	151
declamation	...	...	...	...	...	...	153
reading the Bible	...	...	...	...	...	...	154
dramatic reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	161
reading of wit and humour	...	...	...	...	...	...	169
uses of reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	173
public readings	...	...	...	...	...	...	178
list of popular readings	...	...	...	...	...	...	183

READING, ART OF—(continued)

causes of neglect of	...	...	...	...	...	...	page 11
what to read	...	...	...	...	...	...	28
uses of ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	59
good reading conducs to good speaking	...	...	...	...	...	...	59
requirements of	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
of reading rightly	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
necessary to understand	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
rapidity of perception	...	...	...	...	...	...	61
practice for	...	...	...	...	...	...	62
reading aloud	...	...	...	...	...	...	62
what to avoid	...	...	...	...	...	...	64
mannerism	...	...	...	...	...	...	64
monotony	...	...	...	...	...	...	64
first lesson	...	...	...	...	...	...	65
articulation	...	...	...	...	...	...	67
pronunciation of sentences	...	...	...	...	...	...	69
expression	...	...	...	...	...	...	70
sympathy	...	...	...	...	...	...	72
difference between acting and reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	74
understanding and feeling	...	...	...	...	...	...	77
management of the voice	...	...	...	...	...	...	80
tone	...	...	...	...	...	...	84
emphasis	...	...	...	...	...	...	87
pause and punctuation	...	...	...	...	...	...	93
management of the breath	...	...	...	...	...	...	96
inflection	...	...	...	...	...	...	98
attitude...	...	...	...	...	...	...	101
mental cultivation	...	...	...	...	...	...	103
clerical reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	105, 109
illustration	...	...	...	...	...	...	113
lessons in reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	115
reading by children	...	...	...	...	...	...	119
Hamlet's Soliloquy	...	...	...	...	...	...	122
Hamlet's Speech to the Players	...	...	...	...	...	...	124
Macbeth's Soliloquy	...	...	...	...	...	...	126
Burial of Sir John Moore	...	...	...	...	...	...	128
Queen Mab	...	...	...	...	...	...	130
Nathan's Parable	...	...	...	...	...	...	132
Death of Paul Dombey	...	...	...	...	...	...	135
how to read poetry	...	...	...	...	...	...	138
Invocation to Light	...	...	...	...	...	...	143
Julia's Letter	...	...	...	...	...	...	145
narrative	...	...	...	...	...	...	147
didactic works...	...	...	...	...	...	...	149
sentimental works	...	...	...	...	...	...	151
declamation	...	...	...	...	...	...	153
reading the Bible	...	...	...	...	...	...	154
dramatic reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	161
reading of wit and humour	...	...	...	...	...	...	169
uses of reading	...	...	...	...	...	...	173
public readings	...	...	...	...	...	...	178
list of popular readings	...	...	...	...	...	...	183

SPEAKING, ART OF—(continued)

language of	...	...	...	...	...	...	page 210
first lessons	...	...	...	...	...	...	212
recitation of	...	...	...	...	...	...	213
defects to be overcome	...	...	...	...	...	...	216
remedies for	...	...	...	...	...	...	216
public speaking	...	...	...	...	...	...	218
preparations for	...	...	...	...	...	...	218
do not write your speech	...	...	...	...	...	...	219
your first speech	...	...	...	...	...	...	220
delivery...	...	...	...	...	...	...	224
how to be heard	...	...	...	...	...	...	225
management of the voice	...	...	...	...	...	...	225
tone	...	...	...	...	...	...	226
articulation	...	...	...	...	...	...	228
variety	...	...	...	...	...	...	230
action	...	...	...	...	...	...	232
learn to stand still	...	...	...	...	...	...	233
construction of a speech	...	...	...	...	...	...	238
how to begin	...	...	...	...	...	...	235, 238
the peroration	...	...	...	...	...	...	243
when to sit down	...	...	...	...	...	...	244
oratory of the pulpit	...	...	...	...	...	...	245
oratory of the senate	...	...	...	...	...	...	254
the business speech	...	...	...	...	...	...	256
use and abuse of facts and figures	...	...	...	...	...	...	257
the oration	...	...	...	...	...	...	259
the reply	...	...	...	...	...	...	262
oratory of the bar	...	...	...	...	...	...	264
how to address a jury...	...	...	...	...	...	...	266
character of juries	...	...	...	...	...	...	272
how to address the court	...	...	...	...	...	...	279
how to address magistrates	...	...	...	...	...	...	282
oratory of the platform	...	...	...	...	...	...	285
public meetings	...	...	...	...	...	...	286
parish meetings	...	...	...	...	...	...	291
mixed meetings	...	...	...	...	...	...	291
political meetings	...	...	...	...	...	...	292
religious meetings	...	...	...	...	...	...	293
mob oratory	...	...	...	...	...	...	299
social oratory	...	...	...	...	...	...	319
SPECIAL JURIES—							
how to address...	...	...	...	...	...	...	277
SPEECH—							
construction of...	...	...	...	...	...	...	238
STYLE—							
definition of	...	...	...	...	...	...	34
cultivation of	...	...	...	...	...	...	36

T.

THINKING—

how to think	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	30
when to think	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	31

"TIMES," THE—

on the uses of the art of reading page 109

TOPE—

use of 85, 230
illustrations of 118

V.**VOICE—**

management of 80, 225
tones of 84

W.**WIT—**

definition of 169
how to read 169

WORDS—

study for 23
choice of 24, 40
precision in 48
parsing 49
music of 61

WRITING, ART OF—

first lessons in 21
aid from authors 22
words, study of 23
sentences, framing of 24
avoid adjectives 25
translate poetry into prose 26
reading and thinking 28
what to write 29
what to read 29
preparations for 30
style 34
cultivation of 36
language 39
avoid affectation and conceit 40
grammar 42
choice of words 45
structure of sentences... .. 46
must have something to say 46
expression of thoughts 47
precision in words 48
parsing 49
sentences 50
music of words 51
rhythm 51
various faculties required for 52
write slowly 52
simplicity 53
directness 55
order of ideas 55
difference between, and speaking 197





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